

Michael King: Journalist

a study of the influence of
journalism on King's later writing

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To Michael King

Haere, haere haere e te rangatira,
Haere ki te putahitanga o Rehua
Haere atu ra ki te tini, ki te mano
Haere atu ki te hunga kua wheturangihia
No reira moe mai, moe mai i roto i nga ringaringa o to tatou Matua-nui-I te rangi.

Farewell to a chief... as you depart to the constellation of stars, as you depart to join the myriads of those departed who have become stars, sleep, sleep, sleep.

Contents

ABSTRACT.....	4
CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCTION	5
BIOGRAPHICAL DETAILS	6
CHAPTER 2 – LITERATURE REVIEW	10
INTRODUCTION.....	10
GOOD WRITING	13
RULES FOR GOOD WRITING	16
GOOD WRITING IN JOURNALISM	18
RHETORIC AND ARGUMENT.....	20
JOURNALISM – THE FIRST DRAFT OF HISTORY?	22
WRITING ABOUT MAORI IN NEW ZEALAND	26
NEWS VALUES AND OBJECTIVITY.....	33
NATIONAL IDENTITY.....	40
FEATURE WRITING AND LITERARY JOURNALISM	42
THE MEDIA VIEW OF KING	50
KING’S OWN VIEW OF HIS WORK	53
CONCLUSION.....	55
CHAPTER 3 – RESEARCH METHODOLOGY.....	59
INTRODUCTION.....	59
HOW THE METHODOLOGY HAS BEEN APPLIED	61
CHAPTER 4 – MICHAEL KING.....	63
KING – NEWSPAPER JOURNALIST.....	63
MICHAEL KING – TUTOR.....	70
MICHAEL KING – REVIEWER.....	72
MICHAEL KING – WRITER	73
WRITING ABOUT MAORI.....	75
CHAPTER 5 – FINDINGS	80
WAS KING A GOOD WRITER?	80
CHAPTER 6 - CONCLUSION	99
APPENDIX	104
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	107

Abstract

Michael King is an acclaimed writer, author and communicator. When he died in a car accident he was eulogised as one of New Zealand's leading citizens for his literary contribution. He is celebrated as a writer who communicated history in a way that was palatable and comprehensible to all New Zealanders. He is also remembered for his commentary on New Zealand as a bi-cultural society.

This thesis debates whether his years as a journalist gave him the skills to write, argue and communicate better. King was not a journalist for long and then he taught journalism, but those years served as a bridge between academia and a life in everyday New Zealand.

Good writing and good journalistic writing have been analysed and refined down to basic rules which are then measured against King's work. Drivers to good writing have also been identified and these relate to the emotional and psychological characteristics of a good writer. Anecdotal evidence about King's work as a journalist and then as a writer has been gathered and tested against the rules and drivers.

Two key themes have emerged. One that King was born with a natural ability to write and this was fuelled by strong reading and writing habits early in his life. The second is that King worked at being a good journalist, he learned rules and disciplines which improved his writing and these stayed with him throughout his literary career.

The issue of objectivity is a moot point for journalists and there is debate about how objective journalists can realistically be. One of the reasons King left daily journalism was because he became frustrated with the constraints of objectivity. The thesis debates how this impacted on his writing and the direction of his later work.

Chapter 1 – Introduction

This thesis is about Michael King, the writer. More specifically it explores what made King a good writer, whether his time as a journalist laid the groundwork for this and in what way.

As a New Zealander he was an enigma. Not only did he cross cultural and academic boundaries but he was able to write about it all, seemingly with ease. The question for anyone who seeks to emulate him in the future would be, what ingredients go into the mix to produce a master communicator of King's calibre? Or was his skill a happy accident of natural ability, learning, good genes and excellent timing in the country's evolutionary process?

To research possible answers, the thesis will seek to define good writing, good journalistic writing and the psychological drivers which make a writer want to be better than mediocre. It looks at what constitutes good writing, and how it has developed in various forms of journalism – literary, ethnographical and the journalism of the “fourth world.”

The thesis is not based on the “nature or nurture” debate. It does not try to examine if King was a good writer because he was born that way, or rather that he was brought up to write well due to his home environment. It will look at the genesis of Michael King's writing, the environment which shaped it during the phases of his literary life, and it will look at the topics King chose to write about.

He is best-known for his work among Maori as a journalist and a writer and this work will be explored in terms of news values and the extent to which objectivity was applied.

In the concluding argument this thesis will show that King was a gifted writer by nature, that he learnt a lot of good lessons from his time as a journalist, and that he was driven to write by the belief he had something to say and that it was worthy of being heard. The first chapter provides a brief biographical overview of Michael King from his early education, through his career, to the books he has written.

Biographical details

Michael King was New Zealand's leading writer/historian/social commentator at the start of the 21st century.

But only when the obituary writers started to enumerate the stories he had written; the television series he was involved in; the books he had authored; others' books he had reviewed; and the perspectives he had added to the great debates of the country, did the length and breadth of his contribution become evident to most New Zealanders. Many Maori and Pakeha respected him for his ability to celebrate New Zealand as a diverse yet integrated society. He broke ground for Pakeha journalists who wanted to report on Maori history and tikanga.

His books, *Being Pakeha*, *Being Pakeha Now*, the history of the Belgrave family, and *Hidden Places* all reflect the struggles of a New Zealander of mixed descent trying to find his place in the country to which he both belonged and yet did not.

On March 30 2004 Michael King and his second wife Maria Jungowska died in a car accident. They had both been suffering ill health and were going away on a brief holiday. He was aged 59 and had written or edited 34 books from 1972 onwards.

To appreciate how King evolved as a writer it is important to understand his early family life and his nature even as a boy. King's relationship with words began at pre-school. In *Hidden Places*, a book he wrote to consolidate his journalistic works, he said "long before I went to school I valued books above all other treats."¹ His mother and his maternal grandmother read to him from an early age, and Lewis King, his father, was a well-known advertising man. Michael King recalls authoring books before he could actually write by making drawings and adding markings which he "fancied were words."² It would seem the die was cast.

He talks at length in interviews and autobiographical pieces about his pre-adolescent love of books, both as a form of escape and a way to learn. His appetite was voracious and he

¹ King, M (1992) *Hidden Places: A Memoir In Journalism*, Auckland: Sceptre, p.1

developed a taste for history, albeit in his local environment, even as a boy. His reading matter included the classics – Dickens, Thackeray, Kipling and Hemingway. He claims to have been able to get away with some fairly blatant plagiarism in the third and fourth form at school by styling some of his best essays on stories from these classics:

An epic account of struggling with a kingfish at Paremata, for example, which I managed to insert into a fourth form English exam, was a condensation of *The Old Man and The Sea*, with localizing adjustments to geography and marine life, including some manly boasting over fish hooks in the Pennant Milk Bar in place of Indian wrestling in a Cuban dive. Years later when news editors told me to ‘find a local angle’ for an overseas story, I knew instinctively what was required.³

King flags for the first time a common-sense approach which he took into journalism, one where an early exposure to words and literature triggered skills easily transportable into other literary genre.

His parents, Lew and Nellie King, attracted some interesting visitors to the family home in Wellington and the King children met the likes of Denis Glover and Pat Lawlor. There was a move to Auckland, but the family returned to Wellington and Michael King went to high school at St Patrick’s, Silverstream. In a piece about King a former colleague Warwick Roger quoted one of King’s teachers Spiro Zavos. Zavos, a senior history tutor who later became a journalist, described King as “very teachable”:

I tried to teach AJP Taylor’s style of writing about history. A journalistic style of short, crisp sentences and liberal use of aphorisms, but also with a certain density of facts.⁴

King and some of his friends wrote a school paper (a non official version) called *The Silverstreamer*. King reports that it was closed down after three editions because it “exceeded the boundaries of discretion and good taste.”⁵

² Ibid p.2

³ Ibid p.9

⁴ Ibid p.68

⁵ King, M (2004) *Being Pakeha Now*, Auckland: Penguin p.46

His love of writing and literature continued and he began his early adult life as many young New Zealanders did, by attending his home-town university. By this time he had a taste for journalism. He was paid to write a column called Teen Comment, which appeared in a monthly Christian magazine, later at university he worked for the student magazine *Salient*, and the New Zealand Student Press Association. King, a history student, noticed a lack of books about Maori history. It concerned him and at the time he argued for more emphasis to be placed on an even-handed delivery of history to recognize the Maori role in the evolution of the country. While at Victoria University studying history he worked part-time for the *Evening Post* newspaper in Wellington but his first fulltime journalistic position was with the *Waikato Times* in Hamilton. He moved there in 1968, married with one child.

King had decided to do a Masters degree in history at Waikato University with English literature as a minor. He juggled his study with work on the *Waikato Times* between 1968 and 1971. Once King gained his post-graduate degree his life took on a direction which would see him combine history with writing for television, books, and articles for the rest of his life.

In early 1972 he joined his mentor Christine Cole-Catley as a tutor on the Wellington Polytechnic's journalism programme. He was there for three years before becoming a self-employed writer. He still supplemented his income from a number of sources including teaching creative writing at Victoria University.

King wrote on a diverse range of topics from history to texts for schools, to scenic coffee-table books, to biographies of Maori and non Maori, to bi-cultural discussion pieces. He was published in many countries and traveled abroad several times to research books and meet extended family. In 1977 he went back to Waikato University to complete his doctoral thesis on one of the leaders of the Kingitanga movement, the Princess Te Puea. His supervisors were Professor James Ritchie and the late Robert Mahuta, and he credits them with teaching him much about the methodology and ethics of research and how to work in cross cultural circumstances.⁶ The thesis provided the research for a highly regarded biography of the Princess. He followed it in 1983 with a biography of another Maori woman leader, Dame Whina Cooper. But King's first book was *Moko: Maori Tattooing in the 20th Century*⁷. Although it was the precursor for many books he wrote about Maori for the edification of all

⁶ Ibid, p.67

New Zealanders, and is still highly regarded, it was the first on a topic which would later lead him into controversy. Some of his books are quite small and personal, such as *At The Edge of Memory*, about a member of his family. Others such as the *Penguin History of New Zealand* are much larger. This runs to 130,000 words, and was a best seller over two Christmas holiday seasons. *The Penguin History* was his last complete book. When King died he was working on a history of Waikato University.

⁷ King, M. (1972) *Moko, Maori Tattooing in the 20th Century*, 2nd edition, Auckland: Bateman

Chapter 2 – Literature Review

Introduction

“Talent alone cannot make a writer. There must be a man behind the book.”⁸

There is a view that no matter how far some people travel in academia, how much they publish, or how many genres they explore, they are born with an ability to write in a way which appeals to the masses. This chapter will explore what gives some that ability. It will look at the mechanics of what makes good writing, it will look at what talents are required to make a good writer, and even more a good journalist, and it will examine what qualities a man requires to breath life into rhetoric and make it better than ordinary.

Definitions of writing in the 18th and 19th century often saw it described as a craft. Good writers were good “craftspeople.” Words or passages were “crafted” well, or not. The *Collins Dictionary*⁹ defines *craft* as a skill or ability, it describes *good* as having admirable, pleasing, superior or positive qualities, and *writing* as anything expressed in letters. A literal translation of this could be that *good writing* is written expression which has been constructed to have appeal in a positive way and carries the hallmarks of quality. These hallmarks have been gathered in Model A (see Appendix) which is discussed later in this chapter.

Michael King is frequently referred to as one of New Zealand’s best and most prolific writers. He could have lectured at university, he could have taken an editorial job but he chose to earn less, sacrifice security, and stake his living on writing. To do this he had to be good. This thesis will explore, in part, how King became an appealing communicator in the way he chose his topics, his treatment of them, the ethics and values he applied to his work and whether he was a good writer.

He has been applauded for his crusade to open up the world of Maori for all New Zealanders to understand. An attack by some Maori soured this work for King. He took his own

⁸ Cohen J.M. and M.J. (1991) *Representative Men, A New Penguin Dictionary of Quotations*, London: Penguin, p.159

personal struggle to find his identity into the public arena and challenged other Pakeha to join him in finding a way to connect with New Zealand by right, through their own claims to ethnicity and identity. To do this, again, King had to be a good writer, but so are many others. It is how King developed an ability to combine strong rhetoric, supported by ideals, with a commentator's sense of timing that put him ahead of those others.

Academics who turned to journalism in the same era as King were regarded with cynicism and suspicion by their journalistic colleagues. New recruits were indoctrinated in the view that the only way to learn was to join a newspaper, usually directly from secondary school, start writing the most basic news stories and gradually be elevated through the ranks. They were shaped by the skills and the attitudes of those in the newsrooms around them and they were required to follow well-founded formulae for newsgathering and writing styles.

Detractors were not encouraged. This culture was not all bad. We will look at the positives King took out of it for himself, and how he applied his own personal values to push the boundaries in his print and television work.

Much has been made of King's writing style in that it is simple, clear and yet persuasive. Reviewers of his work have applauded him for being able to make history "popular." Others have marveled at how, as an academic, he turned away from well-paid, ivory-towered theorising to develop arguments in the more popular press which made unlettered New Zealanders question themselves.

But King the journalist was trained as a historian. He had never studied journalism formally and his training in that area was in the fairly unsophisticated environment of the early 1970s though there is evidence to show that the *Waikato Times* was one of the country's most enlightened newspapers. King's technically sound writing skills were honed from an early age. He was a voracious reader and a thinker. Both are necessary, according to the review of the literature, to develop a good writer. King has spoken honestly in his autobiographical pieces about one area in which he struggled. It was this which saw him leave daily journalism for the freedom of a freelance writer. The 1970s were watershed years in New Zealand. International politics were impacting on the government, there was the first hint of a rise in the country's social bi-cultural conscience, the Vietnam war was coming to an end,

⁹ McLeod, W.T. (ed.) (1987) *The Collins Dictionary and Thesaurus*, Collins: London and Glasgow, p.226

and King had views on all these which he felt were being stifled by the middle-of-the-road “objective” culture of the *Waikato Times*.

Much has been written about King, particularly after his death, and most of the eulogies put King’s writing success and ability before his qualifications as a historian. Few have tried to explain how it was that King communicated so well, or how timely his choice of topics were. New Zealand has a number of well regarded historians (some of these are freelance and dubbed ‘feral historians’¹⁰) who have written books and made television series. There are several social commentators who have asked hard questions and opened up debates. There are other writers in New Zealand who have written well about culture, identity, development, and on-going sociological struggles, but none has managed to combine these all in the same way as Michael King. His use of rhetoric to engage in a theme and then expand on it taking the reader along with him was a hallmark of his work from very early on. The use of rhetoric in daily journalism was not consciously being taught in newsrooms of the 1970s any more than it is today, but Norwegian media studies Professor Jostein Gripsrud explains:

Any use of language is rhetorical, in the simple sense that it attempts to make someone else accept, realize, understand, experience etc., something the speaker (sender) means, understands, knows, feels, thinks etc.¹¹

It could be as one *Washington Post* publisher, Philip Graham, put it, that journalism is “the first draft of history.”¹² So it was easy for King to combine his two strengths. This thesis will look at whether it was exposure to no-nonsense New Zealand journalism that put Michael King, historian, aside from the rest and taught him how to pose an argument in a way which would have a constructive and beneficial outcome. And it will question whether King combined his various skills to develop his own particular version of journalism

¹⁰ Dalley B. & J. Phillips (eds) (2001) *Going Public*, Auckland University Press, p.204

¹¹ Gripsrud, J. (1999) *Understanding Media Culture*, London: Arnold, p.156

¹² Solomon, N. (2001) ‘Katherine Graham and History: Slanting the First Draft’, *Common Dreams*, July 20, URL: <http://www.commondreams.org/views01/0720-04.htm> (accessed 13.12.05)

Good writing

Most reviewers were agreed, Michael King was a good writer. The recorded definitions of good writing are partly subjective, partly tested and proven over time, but two common themes run through them. One, that there are basic rules which are observed by all good writers. These can be taught and are quite prescriptive. For example, writing is an instrument for conveying ideas from one mind to another, said the erudite Sir Ernest Gowers: “the writer’s job is to make his reader apprehend his meaning readily and precisely.”¹³ He quotes Robert Louis Stevenson as having said the difficulty is not to write “but to write what you mean, not to just affect your reader, but to affect him precisely as you wish.” Gowers, while accepting that correct grammar and syntax as “rules” have their place in good writing, cautions that one can no more write good English, than compose good music just by keeping to the rules. He said these were aids to writing intelligibly but it was choice of the right words which was the key to good writing. Then he said, the right words had “the happy knack of arranging themselves.”¹⁴ New Zealand’s CK Stead puts his definition more poetically, saying: “Good writing offers a grammatical dance, a verbal music.”¹⁵ The other theme is that good writing is instinctive and even ego driven. The combination of the two themes is a balance of a calculated intellectual approach to good writing enlivened by personality and determination to produce work which is not only academically correct but highly readable.

George Orwell was a supporter of plain English expression as the height of good writing because it was the most free from political control. In an essay entitled *Politics and the English Language* he bemoaned the decline of written English, saying, “our civilization is decadent and our language – so the argument runs – must inevitably share in the general collapse.” He examined a number of written passages and described the main faults in all of them as staleness of imagery and lack of precision, “this mixture of vagueness and sheer incompetence is the most marked characteristic of modern English prose....”¹⁶ The remainder of the essay campaigns against meaningless and useless words. He summed up his recipe for good writing in five points: no clichés, no long words, cut out any words which can

¹³ Gowers, E.(1968) *Plain Words*, London: Penguin, p.9

¹⁴ Ibid, p.12

¹⁵ C.K. Stead, (2000) *The Writer At Work*, Dunedin: University of Otago Press, p.197

¹⁶ Neale, R.(ed.) (1992) *Writers on Writing*, Auckland: Oxford University Press, p.173

be cut out, use the active whenever possible, and never use a foreign phrase or jargon if a plain English equivalent will do. He adds “break any of these rules rather than say anything outright barbarous.”¹⁷ This advice can still be found in books teaching writing at the turn of the 21st century.

There are a number views on how to execute good writing and what drives good writers. These range from the sheer discipline of continually writing to improve technique, to those bordering on Freudian psychological theory – the influence of the ego as a motivating force for the writer. These are summarized in Model C (see Appendix). Orwell supported the view that persona and ego play a role in the drive towards good writing. The desire to seem clever, to be talked about, to be remembered after death and even to get your own back on grown-ups who snubbed you in childhood, were strong motives, he said.¹⁸

Robert Neale in his introduction to an anthology of *Writers on Writing* said:

Writing, to be any good at all, must call up something already in the writer, taking outward shape in response to some inward pressure.... Ego’s role in good writing occurs when people will bother about their writing if they feel they are on show or have something at stake in having their work read.¹⁹

To communicate by writing, then by extrapolation to ensure that writing is “good,” Neale says the writing must follow, or deliberately flout, the conventions of some genre or a combination of genre. He identified four essential variables of any act of writing as the writer’s persona, readership, genre and subject-matter. These are collected under the acronym RAFT (role, audience, format and topic).²⁰ King’s persona, readership, the relationship he had with that readership, the transition between genres, and the choice of subject matter will all be points for debate in this thesis.

Persona has already been discussed in the role of the ego – an effort to achieve “good” writing which will be understood and admired by others (Model C). Culture’s effect on good writing can be analysed in terms of Neale’s acronym RAFT under “role” and “audience.”

¹⁷ Ibid, p.182

¹⁸ Ibid, p.187

¹⁹ Ibid p.xi

²⁰ Ibid p.xiii

(Models A and B). Good New Zealand writing flourished in the 1900s through writers such as Katherine Mansfield, and Frank Sargeson. D.M. Davin, in his introduction to a selection of Mansfield's short stories did not comment so much on the technical aspects of her writing, but on her marked individual style which ran through everything she wrote, the role she took, and one theme that was constant; the necessity to write better.²¹ Looking at literature and writing from a New Zealand perspective, Wystan Curnow said bad writing was bad writing and no amount of "indigenous advertisements" could give it better than sentimental value. But good writing was good writing, and he set out the minimal requirements as accuracy, purpose, coherence of design and original vision.²² Maurice Shadbolt's self-defined task in the development of good New Zealand writing was to "explore, to illuminate and to transmit a vision of the national sensibility", said Cherry Hankin in her introduction to his book, *The New Zealanders*.²³ One of New Zealand's leading Maori authors is clear on his role, his audience, and his personal motivation. Witi Ihimaera, says he began writing to make New Zealanders aware of their "other", Maori, heritage:

To convince my countrymen, with love and anger, that they must take their Maori personality into account.My way is with the pen; others of my people use more forceful means.²⁴

He talks of the difficulties in persuading Maori elders to allow an oral tradition to be turned into words on pages, and Pakeha editors to publish them. He said to ensure he was not patronized over his ability as a writer, "for a Maori, that is", he must be a writer first and a Maori second. All these comments demonstrate a burden placed on New Zealand writers to be better than they necessarily need to be in order to be perceived as good as international writers. Curnow, Shadbolt and Ihimaera are under no illusion that a New Zealander readership would be more sympathetic to their craftsmanship because they are fellow countrymen. Rather the opposite – that they need be even better at their craft to rise above parochial support. This could also be said of King who took a different direction, arguably due to his journalistic training, to achieve a similar open-minded acceptance, supporting a contention that "good" writers seek the no-concessions, objective approval of their readership.

²¹ Mansfield, K. (1969) *Selected Stories*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, p.ix

²² Curnow, W. (1973) *Essays on New Zealand Literature*, Auckland: Heinemann, p.148

²³ Shadbolt, M (1976) *The New Zealanders*, Christchurch: Whitcoulls p.1

²⁴ Neale, R. (ed.) (1992) *Writers on Writing*, Auckland: Oxford University Press, p.215

Rules for good writing

Michael King is acclaimed as a “good” writer. But what is good writing? Is what is generally accepted as good journalistic writing also good standard English writing?

Like many disciplines good writing is based on a set of rules which are taught in schools, and refined and defined upwards through the education process. Good writing is partly judged on the writer’s adherence to these rules. Most use, whether they are aware of it or not, **Standard English**, also known as **Standard Written English** or **SWE**. This is the form of English most widely accepted as being clear and proper. Publishers, writers, educators, and others have over the years developed a consensus on standard English. It includes word choice, word order, punctuation, and spelling (see Model A). Standard English is especially helpful when writing because it maintains a fairly uniform standard of communication which can be understood by all speakers and users of English regardless of differences in dialect, pronunciation, and usage. This is why it is sometimes called Standard *Written* English. There are a few minor differences between standard usage in England and the United States, but these differences do not significantly affect communication in the English language.²⁵

A number of university websites show the following to be the most common guidelines for good writing:

- Know your audience/readers.
- Use words familiar to your readers and avoid unnecessary or potentially confusing jargon.
- Clarity. Be clear and to the point. Say what you mean as clearly as you can.
- Accuracy and completeness add to your credibility. Include all important details – no more and no less.
- Adopt an appropriate tone. Writing in a conversational style using simple words is usually the most effective way to communicate your message. Use active rather than passive voice.

²⁵ ‘Standard English’, *English Plus*, URL: <http://englishplus.com/grammar/00000374.htm>

- Use short, simple words. Avoid wordiness. Use specific and concrete language. Avoid clichés. Strive for sentence variety. Use Parallel Structure (make sure clauses start and end the same way). (Summarised in Model A).

On closer analysis the words chosen to define good writing are as dependent on context and circumstance as the definition itself. Take Neale's four essential variables – role, audience, format and topic. These, he says, provide a “buoyant platform on which to float our ideas out into the luxury and peril of public scrutiny.” He admits that handbooks on writing, if they recognize them at all, can have little to say in detail about any of them, because each arises very specifically from the circumstances of the moment.²⁶ Role arises in many guises in the wider sense of good writing. In literature there is a role for the storyteller, the raconteur, the author seeking catharsis through writing, the biographer, or the spinner of dreams. In each of these the writer takes permission to give something of himself into the fabric of the written piece. The writer will set the tone, and open a channel of communication via the written words to convey a message. There are no rules about how those written words are used apart from the conventions of Standard Written English, but what is crucial to the success, or otherwise, of the message being well communicated is context, and this is where the writer's innate ability comes into play – or not. Writers decide on their role and take a position as they begin to write their piece. C.K. Stead says New Zealanders incline to the Roundhead tradition, which pays too much attention to the purpose and the message and not enough to the art.²⁷

Twenty journalism students were surveyed on their definition of good writing. Eight said clarity was most important, followed by seven wanting good punctuation and grammar. Five said they felt good writing had to be interesting, “to make you want to read on”, and there were four votes each for factual, informative and descriptive. Other factors they wanted to see were a demonstration that the writer knew their topic, that there was interest at the start of the story, and that the sentences were short and concise.²⁸ These views are validated by Robert M Knight in *A Journalistic Approach to Good Writing*, who, as a journalism lecturer, says he spends more time teaching his students how to write than he does teaching them to be journalists. His basic guidelines for good writing advise :

²⁶ Neale, R. (ed.) (1992) ‘Introduction’, *Writers on Writing*, Auckland: Oxford University Press, p.xiii

²⁷ Stead, C.K. (2000) *The Writer At Work*, Dunedin: University of Otago Press, p.198

²⁸ Waiariki Institute of Technology journalism programme, Rotorua, 14.02.05

- Know who your audience is and write to it.
- Use nouns and verbs and cut down on the use of modifiers.
- Avoid clichés “like the plague”. Be specific. Use colour when you can, colour illuminates.
- Use the active voice, it is more honest.
- When all else fails write with energy. Convince the reader you are convinced.²⁹

Good writing in journalism

Views on good writing and good journalism overlap and apply in general to most forms of writing for public consumption. A journalist would be expected to adhere to all the points laid out in Model A and add the refinements set out in Model B. It should be noted that many recognized British and American writers started their careers as journalists. Britain’s Wynford Hicks believes journalistic writing is putting one word after another so that the reader gets the message, or the joke, goes on reading and comes back for more:

Good writing is essential to journalism; without it, important news, intriguing stories, insight and analysis, gossip and opinion could not reach their potential audience.³⁰

Hicks refers his readers to the Anglo-American tradition on journalism that good writing should mirror speech. In a comparison of a number of authors who began their lives as journalists he credits George Orwell as perhaps the best exponent of the plain style in English literature, saying it is the content which drives the words. Ernest Hemingway who wrote ‘The Old Man and the Sea,’ was famous for the simplicity of his writing, but, Hicks says, Hemingway’s good writing was no accident, it was cleverly constructed to appear simple.³¹ Orwell himself advised:

A scrupulous writer in every sentence he writes, will ask himself at least four questions, thus ‘What am I trying to say? What words will express this? What image

²⁹ Knight, R. (2003) *A Journalistic Approach to Good Writing, The Craft Of Clarity*, Iowa: Iowa State Press, p.9

³⁰ Hicks, W. et al. (1999) *Writing for Journalists*, London and New York: Routledge, p.1

³¹ Ibid p.126

or idiom will make it clearer? Is this image fresh enough to have an effect?’ And he will probably ask himself two more: ‘Could I have put it more simply? Have I said anything unavoidably ugly?’³²

The discipline of writing to space in newspapers challenged a young Rudyard Kipling, who won a Nobel Prize for literature in 1907. He bemoaned in his autobiography, *Something of Myself*, that newspaper spaces “limited my canvas” and yet within these limitations he had to write “some sort of beginning, middle and end”:

My ordinary reporting, leader and note writing carried the same lesson which took me an impatient while to learn. Added to this I was almost nightly responsible for my output to visible and often brutally voluble critics at the Club. They were not concerned with my dreams. They wanted accuracy and interest, but most of all accuracy.³³

Word economy taught Kipling... “it was necessary that every word should tell, carry, weigh, taste and if needs were, smell.”³⁴ That has not changed and still appears high on the list of basic requirements. He described a process which he called Higher Editing, in which a written piece was left to lie, then edited, and the procedure repeated several times until what he called the “shortening process” was complete. Many young reporters from academic backgrounds where writing 2000 word essays was the norm find news writing difficult. Compose a story of 300 words and every word has to count, says London lecturer Richard Keeble. He is one of many journalism textbook writers who stress the need to cut euphemisms out of news stories. Casting aside the “academic trappings of their backgrounds and the jargon that accompanies it” was a challenge for young journalists. The reporter’s task was to learn rapidly the jargon of a group and translate it into terms comprehensible to a mass readership. It was not easy, particularly when it was spoken at speed, he said.³⁵

King had to make this distinction and has described journalism as the antidote to the Ivory Tower mentality.³⁶ This thesis will examine whether he was able to take this one step further

³² Orwell, G. (1984) *Penguin Essays of George Orwell*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, p.10

³³ Neale, R. (ed.) (1992) *Writers on Writing*, Auckland: Oxford University Press, p.114

³⁴ Ibid

³⁵ Keeble, R. (1998) *The Newspapers Handbook*, London and New York: Routledge, p.192

³⁶ Smith, C. (1992) Communication Is The Key, *Otago Daily Times*, 28 Oct., p.23

and use journalism to take Ivory Tower topics back into the popular domain and make connections across social and cultural boundaries.

Rhetoric and Argument

One of the first techniques a journalist learns is to produce a news story in the style of an argument. The intention is to present an item for discussion by giving opposing views then letting the reader make up their mind who or what is right or wrong. This form of adversarial journalism is popular because it provides conflict, debate and represents a robust argument. It also provides a platform to satisfy the need for balance which all news stories are ethically required to have. A second use of argument in journalism requires stronger rhetorical skills on the part of the journalist as he or she seeks to persuade their reader by way of examples, quotations, expert views etc that a particular view or course of action is preferable. We will hear later from King's teachers, his colleagues, his editors and his reviewers that he was technically a good writer, but most go further than that and talk about his ability to engage with his audience, to affect his readers through his words, added to his ability, learned firstly in his Maori reporting, to establish rapport with his subjects and empathy with their stories.

The nucleus of this technique was identified by Aristotle more than 2300 years ago in his theory on the three-part structure of an argument. Disagreeing with his teacher Plato, who disapproved of the way public speakers manipulated their audiences with little regard for the truth, Aristotle set about to show that good rhetoric was not only persuasive but ethical.³⁷ He refined all public presentations down to three rhetorical proofs. The first for a journalist would be the logos or the logical details, the facts, or in simple terms the Ws and H taught as the basics of any news story. The second part is the pathos, the drama generally represented by the colourful or powerful quotations, the human side of the story which evokes the emotions and the third is the ethos or the ethical component of the journalist's work, the ability to function as an objective professional with sensitivity and decency.

³⁷ Fournier, S.(2005) "What Is A Taste of Rhetoric?". *Welcome to a Taste of Rhetoric*, URL: <http://stevefournier01.tripod.com/hist/hist-2html> (accessed 04.01.06)

These are also known as modes of persuasion and a website given over to American rhetoric claims that there are three means of effecting persuasion:

The man who is to be in command of them must, it is clear, 1) Be able to reason logically, 2) Be able to understand human character and goodness in their various forms and 3) Be able to understand the emotions, that is, to name them and describe them, to know their causes and the way in which they are excited.³⁸

Pulitzer prizewinning publisher, Jack Fuller describes rhetoric in the 20th century variously as “the art of using language effectively,” “the body of rules to be observed by a speaker or writer in order that he may express himself with eloquence” and “the art of persuasion.”³⁹ In discussing the rhetoric of news⁴⁰ Fuller highlights a number of nineteenth century news writing techniques which have greatly influenced the way news has been presented ever since. One was a drive for “tightness” which while it conserved newsprint and time and was an antidote to flowery writing, eliminated many useful techniques such as pathos, and produced work so brief that the reader struggled to grasp the meaning out of a few words.

Fuller is also unconvinced that the inverted pyramid format for writing a news story is applicable today. It dates back to the days of the unreliable Morse code telegraph service when however few words got through there would be enough to provide essential facts for a story. Or later, particularly in the days of “hot type,” if a story was too long the sub editor could cut it from the bottom. This structure should be used sparingly now, says Fuller, and in its place are a variety of structures dictated by the “voice” of the writer and the audience being appealed to.

“Public journalism” and whether it impinges on the role of rhetoric is the subject of an on-going debate in the United States. Described as “do-gooding” journalism it challenges many previous “arms length” bastions of media function and as New York University professor of journalism Jay Rosen has said, “traditional journalism worries about getting the separations right. Public journalism is about trying to get the connections right.”⁴¹

³⁸ Roberts, W. Rhys (trans) (2001) “Aristotle on Rhetoric”, *American Rhetoric*, URL:<http://www.americanrhetoric.com/artistotletrhetoric.htm> (accessed 04.01.06)

³⁹ Fuller, J.(1996) *News Values*, Chicago: Chicago Press p.101

⁴⁰ Ibid pp.125-126

⁴¹ Liebes, T. and Curran J. (eds) (1998) *Media, Ritual and Identity*, London & New York: Routledge, pp.203-204

In his *Project on Public Life and the Press*, Rosen has identified 10 claims of separation which could be construed as sanitizing the functions of journalists and the newsgathering arms of newspaper companies, among these is a requirement that, “a good journalist separates reality from rhetoric.”⁴² By contrast a public press has a role to promote and improve on, not just to report on or complain about, the quality of public life. King struggled with several of Rosen’s separations as he became more disenchanted with journalism at the *Waikato Times*. The opportunities to let a story flow and evolve through argument and debate were not there. Space limited King’s canvas as it did Rudyard Kipling’s and King found that the longer he stayed at the *Times* the less actual writing he was able to do.⁴³ However his stories particularly about Maori had allowed him to exercise Aristotle’s three basic points and his talent for empathy and pathos, ran through his interviewing style and into his writing. He developed that rare talent all journalists aspire to – to be able to interact well both verbally and in writing to not only elicit the best information but to re-present it in the best way.

Journalism – the first draft of history?

If Katharine Graham ‘always spoke truth to power’ then journalism and history are lost in a murky twilight zone....⁴⁴

This according to columnist Norman Solomon in a piece about Katharine Graham and her husband Philip, both publishers of the *Washington Post*. Philip Graham described journalism as the ‘first draft of history’. If it is, then no one should have been more aware of this than King with one foot in each camp. Robert Drake who writes for Christian journalists at the World Journalism Institute has a view on the interface between journalism and history from that perspective. The institute’s website says:

⁴² Ibid p.204

⁴³ King, M. (1999) *Being Pakeha Now*, Penguin Book: Auckland, p.94

⁴⁴ Solomon, N. (2001) ‘Katherine Graham and History: Slanting the first Draft’, *Common Dreams*, July 20, URL: <http://www.commondreams.org/views01/0720-04.htm> (accessed 13.12.05)

If it is true that journalists write the first draft of history, then it is crucial for journalists of faith to be epistemologically self conscious. Why is that? The reason is that historians have an advantage over journalists in that historians select an event or person to investigate after the fact. As Robert Drake has noted this historical selection is possible because writing history starts with a known goal. The historical looks back from that goal to see how the goal was reached. So the historical investigation always has guidelines and an intellectual gyroscope directing the content, and interpretation of the historian's narrative. That historical intellectual gyroscope, cognitive guideline is missing for the journalist because the journalist is writing contemporary, instant narrative. So the journalist is excluded from using historical events or personages for guiding the narrative. Both the historian and the journalist deal with facts but the historian can wait for hindsight before fact selections are made. The journalist cannot wait because fact selections are made daily, under the pressure of deadlines and competition.⁴⁵

For this reason Drake and the World Institute teach their students to maintain a Christian worldview, a blueprint of faith against which to operate. Andie Tucher puts it similarly but more metaphorically:

Historians are the hedgehogs who know one big thing, journalists the foxes who know many things. Historians locate themselves within and draw upon (or argue with) a community of scholarship; journalists parachute in and take everyone out to lunch. Historians are freer from the pressures of the marketplace; journalists are freer to make the best seller list. The darkest temptation of the historian is plagiarism; of the journalist, fabrication. The historians are the ones most skittish about using the first person singular. The journalists are the ones most sunburned on the nose.⁴⁶

Tucher is not saying journalists are having all the fun though. She claims that historians are no longer waiting until passions have cooled but are incorporating interviews and on-the-spot interaction into their writing about current or recent events and more of them are aiming for audiences beyond academia. To prove historians are not as she puts it “immune to a good yarn, they just use it differently”, she cites Princeton Professor Robert Darnton who has

⁴⁵ The Francis A Schaeffer Chair of Apologetics (2005) URL: <http://www.worldddji.com/schaeffer> (accessed 13.12.05)

dubbed a new phrase “incident analysis” which is gaining currency among academics. Using this technique the historian takes a newsworthy event, even one relating to hard news, and uses it as the central point to argue a case. In King’s case he used people rather than events, but achieved a similar end. In the convergence between writing for mass audience appeal and writing for the academy the academy did not forsake King, even if some thought King had forsaken it. Analyzing the writing of history for wider appeal New Zealand historian Bronwyn Dalley notes that there are a growing number of freelance scholars who are producing a large body of work independent of universities or the government, and she cites the scholarship of King as perhaps the most well known.⁴⁷

Susan Butterworth has written a lively chapter in the same book, *Going Public*, about “feral historians”. This is a term coined by her husband, fellow historian, Graham Butterworth and now thought to aptly describe those among the profession who have taken commissions to do work in the community and created a “special niche between the academic historian and the journalist or current affairs commentator”.⁴⁸ Susan Butterworth sees these views clearly and points out that in occupying that niche there is a double responsibility that the writer ensures he or she can draw:

“...fair and defensible conclusions but also to avoid meddling in the present affairs of the organizations or individuals concerned. A judgment in a newspaper may be forgotten by next week, but those in a history may stay in circulation for decades, affecting lives and careers”.

King describes himself as a historian or a writer, depending on the context. For him, there does not appear to be any snobbery attached to either designation and they are interchangeable depending on the view he is putting at the time. He rarely refers to himself as a journalist although much of his work is clearly journalism of a kind. His book on the French government’s sinking of the protest vessel the Rainbow Warrior is the most obvious case-in-point. It will take its place as a historical record of that particular time in New Zealand’s history, though it was clearly researched and written by a journalist’s hand and sold well in the bookshops.

⁴⁶ Tucher, A. (2004) Whose Turf is the Past? *Columbia Journalism Review*, Sept-Oct, p.46

⁴⁷ Dalley, B. and J. Phillips (eds) (2001) *Going Public*, Auckland University Press, p.19

Drake's view is that historians have the benefit of hindsight to draw on but journalists have to deal with the facts as they are presented, rapidly, at the time. Tucher takes historians out of the closet and in to the present light of day. She sees the boundaries between the professions "crashing" but all the evidence in her paper points to historians learning a new skill-set from journalists to gain more public appeal, while there is no sign that journalists are about to find the chronological, de-personalised structure of an academic paper appealing. She talks of one historian relishing writing a book which is based on "a hell of a good story", a phrase generally reserved for journalists. A key to King's success was his ability to spot "a hell of a good story." The thesis for his doctorate was a shrewd choice. He developed from it a biography of one of this country's most influential female political figures, she was Maori and her existence had been largely overlooked by other historians up until then. Jock Phillips points out King was not interested in historical theory, "there is no 'King thesis' in the way that there is a 'Fairburn thesis'," but Phillips adds he had a "great respect for the hard facts of evidence". King took from journalism into his later historical work a clear lesson never to start in the archives but to allow start with contact with people.⁴⁹

King summed it up quite logically in *Hidden Places* saying given that he had interests in both history and writing it was inevitable that they would overlap. He described history as "an attempt to organize events and ideas into meaningful patterns" and this was entirely in harmony with what he viewed was also the role of the writer.⁵⁰

Traditionally historians are cast in the role of dusty academics who study events which have passed and deal with the dead rather than the living. They are recorders of history rather than makers of it and they have not been lauded for their lively writing style. King may be been the forerunner of a new style of historian, one who took all the technical elements of good writing, applied a journalist's eye for news and dragged past events which had been consigned to history back into the national arena. Even more he appears to subscribe to the theory of Thomas Carlyle that "history is the essence of innumerable biographies."⁵¹ Each generation has an expectation that the next generation will learn from its mistakes, in King's case he appears not prepared to wait for that to happen. He wanted to "fix" things there and then. Tucher's parallels between journalists and historians appear brazen but may well mark

⁴⁸ Ibid, pp.206-207

⁴⁹ Phillips, J. (2004) *New Zealand Books*, Vol 14, pp.1-3

⁵⁰ King, M. (1992) *Hidden Places*, Sceptre: Auckland p.185

a turn in the way historical events are presented in real time. It should not be overlooked that history is being recorded far more quickly than it has before thanks to modern communication devices and a fast-moving society. King recognized that history was not represented in past events separated by generations, but was being made daily and as such needed to be recorded.

In concert with this both Jock Phillips and Professor James Ritchie supported King's form of recording New Zealand's history in a writing style which was easy to read and as such followed the tenets of good writing for all to access. They both credited his journalism training for this.

Writing about Maori in New Zealand

No writer should under-rate this challenge until they have tried it. For a non Maori to write about Maori is as presumptuous as an outsider claiming to have written a clear account about the life of a family of which they are not a member. Maori are much more than an important family in the wider context of New Zealand, they are its founding race, and it was with fascination and excitement that King approached his work among Maori. He very much wanted the rest of New Zealand to join him on the journey as he discovered what a proud and complex race the Maori are, and what fascinating people dwell amongst them.

He became well-known for his reporting of Maori issues in the Waikato. At that time there were few Maori journalists trained to work in that area and few Pakeha journalists who would take the time and trouble to educate themselves to do the job.

One of the best known lists of news values was put together in 1965 by Johan Galtung and Mari Holmboe Ruge.⁵¹ It was initially used for analysing coverage of international events and under the fourth value, "meaningfulness" they discussed:

⁵¹ Cohen, J.M. and M.J., (1992) *The New Penguin Book of Quotations*, London: Penguin p159

⁵² Fiske (1987) "News Values" *CCSM Infobase*,

URL, <http://www.cultsock.ndirect.co.uk/MUHome/cshtml/media/nvdetail.html> (accessed 10.01.06)

Cultural proximity: events that accord with the cultural background of the news-gatherer will be seen as more meaningful than others, and so more liable to be selected.⁵³

This could be partly due to conditioning during upbringing; it could be partly due to the journalist not wanting to break out of what is often referred to as “the comfort zone”; and it could be due to something as simple as thoughtlessness on the part of the journalist. Given that in 2003, 93 per cent of those who responded to a New Zealand survey of journalists were Pakeha, any of the three could account for a European bias in the way news is selected and portrayed in this country. Thirteen journalists were Maori, one Samoan and seven of other nationalities. The survey also reported that 57 (19 per cent) indicated they could speak Maori, but for most their level of fluency was modest or minimal extending mainly to common words or greetings.⁵⁴ (Another barrier to newsgathering in that environment?)

There are several Pakeha journalists who have made a great effort to report on and develop their own networks in order to provide a Maori voice in the New Zealand media. They include Carol Archie, Andrew Robb, Gary Wilson and Michael King. All have at one time or another assisted in the Waiariki Institute of Technology pre-entry and now diploma and iwi radio journalism training courses.

A further raft of Pakeha academics have researched and published on the poor record New Zealand has in representing its Treaty partner in the news media, and its even poorer record at attempting to understand that partner to better represent its culture. These people include Dr Judy McGregor, Sue Abel, Paul Spoonley, and Ian Stuart. David Robie has done significant work among the Pacific people and there is overlap in a number of areas.

All of these contend that news-writers who are familiar with the culture in which they work would do their job better than those who are ignorant of it. Maori academic Ranginui Walker said:

From the nineteenth century to the present day, the Fourth Estate has played a consistent role in the way it selects, constructs and publishes news about Maori.

This one sided discourse has resulted in Maori seceding from mainstream media to

⁵³ Abel, S. (1997) *Shaping The News*, Auckland: Auckland University Press, p.203

construct their own positive stories from success and cultural revival in magazines such as *Mana* and *Tu Mai*.....Pakeha perceptions of Maori will not change unless there is a radical change in the culture of the mainstream media.⁵⁵

It could be argued that the news values journalists see placed on news selection in newsrooms around New Zealand are based on the “culture” of that newsroom. Even more, that those news gatherers will be subconsciously influenced by their own backgrounds in the kinds of news they gather and the angles they take. But in reporting on Maori issues or those of any other culture it goes deeper than that. It is not enough to lift the quota of stories about Maori in any one edition or broadcast, it is not enough to employ a proportionate amount of Maori staff in a newsroom, (known anecdotally as ‘brown washing’) but it is about understanding how the culture “works” to be able to represent it accurately and dare we say it, objectively .

In the Maori world this means having knowledge of tikanga. “Tikanga” is the customs, traditions, views, relationships, protocols and all the other intangibles which when drawn together to make a strong ethos on which to live a good and respectful life.

Maori also have a different decision-making process, they honour their dead loved ones and ancestors more openly and formally than many other cultures and there is a protocol which decides who can speak on a marae, or at a meeting, for that meeting or issue.

In Pakeha New Zealand a public meeting means just that and any journalist can report on the proceedings. The Maori equivalent is a hui but this runs to a very different set of rules and woe betide any reporter who tries to apply Pakeha process to a hui. The taking of photographs is another delicate area. Press photographers and TV camera-people need to have specific knowledge of tikanga to work in Maoridom, particularly around ceremonial occasions. If the New Zealand media understood the deeply rooted reasons for the above much of the current misunderstanding and poor reportage would fall away.

An example of this is given by Phillip Whaanga:

⁵⁴ Lealand, G. (2004) *A Survey of New Zealand Journalists*, Hamilton: University of Waikato, p.6

⁵⁵ *Ibid*, p.231

In the largely “underground’ Maori world important discussion still takes place on rural marae, in homes and workplaces. Because important and skilled people in the Maori world are not necessarily holding down important position in the Pakeha world (they may be gang leaders or kohanga reo kaitiaki), meetings are held out of work time so they can attend. Thus weekend hui are commonplace. But that is just the time when reporters are scarce...so most important hui are just not reported.⁵⁶

Michael King learned quickly when he took on the Maori round at the *Waikato Times* that many of his weekends would be spent this way. In *Being Pakeha Now* he tells how he became immersed in reporting on Maori issues and how he learned to comport himself:

For the first couple of months I floundered and wrote stories as best I could. Then I bought a second-hand copy of Leslie Kelly’s tribal history Tainui, enrolled in continuing education Maori language classes, sought out people who could help me and joined the Waikato Historical and Archaeological Societies.⁵⁷

King found there were no Maori in the societies and left. He found local kaumatua who were willing to help, learned his mihi, (an introduction of himself in Te Reo Maori) and was taken under the wing of Maori leaders such as Harry Dansey and Eva Rickard. From then onwards he gained the trust and respect of the Tainui people, so much so that eventually they co-operated over the life story of Te Puea, their Princess. King’s strength in Maoridom was not so much in that he knew how to report on regular Maori news, this was more the domain of Archie, Robb and Wilson, but that he was prepared to take the time and the trouble to understand Maori as a race apart to be respected, and then operate as a journalist and a writer on their terms. This gave him the leads, in journalistic terms, to draw on his historical and research capabilities to do some major literary work among Maori. One example of how he did this can be found a piece he wrote for a *School Journal* about attending a tangi (funeral) with his small son Jonty, seen mostly through Jonty’s eyes. These were the images which King used best to introduce Pakeha New Zealanders to the tangata whenau (people of the land).

His most testing time was during the filming of his television series Tangata Whenua:

⁵⁶ Spoonley, P. and W. Hirsch (eds) (1990) *Between The Lines*, Auckland: Heinemann Reed, p.60

⁵⁷ King, M. (1999) *Being Pakeha Now* Auckland: Penguin Books, p.77

The Tangata Whenua series was the most ambitious and painful project that has tried to redress the imbalance in the media.Tangata Whenua has its origin in my experience as a newspaper journalist and an author. I found myself often in emotionally charged situations. But I often found it difficult to represent these situations in word alone. So I became aware that film was potentially the most arresting, affecting and practical way of transporting people to them. That there was some value in doing so I never doubted. People who do not participate in the cultural options available to them neither know nor grow in their own country.⁵⁸

While his time as a journalist working on the Maori round taught him many of the mores of the Maori world, King and his television crew learned much more in the weeks of filming. Afterwards King said he was pleased he had made the documentary but never again did he want to delve so deeply in people's lives and make decisions on what should be represented and what should not. Jock Phillips still calls Tangata Whenua arguably the best television documentary ever made in New Zealand and states it changed the way he, "a Christchurch Pakeha boy," saw the country.⁵⁹ King's ability to walk and work with Maori, while not to be undervalued, was born out of basic common sense. He had a good theoretical knowledge of New Zealand history and the ways of Maori but he was astute enough to realize this would do him no good on a day-to-day basis. He did what anyone does when they wish to mingle among the people of a new culture – he learned the language, observed the customs and took a genuine interest in the people. As a historian he knew that Maori was an oral language, and the passing down of history was an oral tradition. The only way he was going to engage with his interview subjects, or gain the trust of contacts, was to invest time and he did.

Fortunately for King he was granted time during his years at the *Waikato Times*. Colleagues recall how he would work hard on general news all morning, to be free in the afternoon to go out on to the marae and into the small settlements talking to people and gathering stories. Those skills never left King, and utilized alongside his non-threatening, gentle interviewing style enabled him to build rapport with the most reticent of subjects. King's good upbringing and his training also taught him how to maintain his contacts. He did not use people and discard them, they took him into their families and he continued to care about them. One

⁵⁸ King, M. (1992) *Hidden Places*, Auckland: Sceptre p.87

⁵⁹ Phillips, J. (2004) *New Zealand Books*, Vol 14, pp.1-3

family told King that their mother had cried after he left her the last time he visited before she passed away. One other skill King learned was to take interview notes unobtrusively or not at all, remembering as much as he could then making careful notes as soon after the interview as possible.

Journalism educator, Jim Tucker talks about the objectivity myth in relation to Pakeha reporters covering Maori issues. He says Pakeha journalists tend to:

...analyse, summarise, categorise and report issues based on what they know. That is, their 'objectivity,' their essentially non-Maori, non-minority, non-marginalized world view.⁶⁰

Many Maori would support the view that what is seen as "good journalism" in a Pakeha culture-bound media, is shallow, one-dimensional, and plain ignorant to Maori. Tucker goes further saying that reporting on Maori affairs is more a state of mind than anything else. "It is difficult (for this author at least) to separate that thought from the myth of objectivity." His summarised view of objectivity in reporting on Maori issues is that it is personal, it is not fixed and it can be influenced. But he does say that the level of objectivity comes down to how far New Zealand journalists as individuals are prepared to allow their objectivity to be influenced "and dare we say it, changed."⁶¹ In a society such as New Zealand's which is leaning towards bi-culturalism the focus of some of Galtung and Ruge's contentions are changing. Sue Abel has studied national television coverage of one Waitangi Day celebration and how European news factors impacted on and influenced that coverage:

While those I interviewed (news workers) acknowledged that the news could not be objective, many did not seem to question traditional news values or to be aware that such values might reflect or promote a particularly Pakeha perspective.⁶²

She felt the reason for this could be the circles and environment the news gatherers lived in; socialisation into the norms and routines of news gathering such as happens in any institutions; and ideological pressures in the wider society which lead people to assume that

⁶⁰ Tucker, J. (2001) *Intro: A Guide to New Zealand Journalism*, 2nd edn, Wellington: NZJTO, p.266

⁶¹ *Ibid*, p.267

⁶² Abel, S. (1997) *Shaping The News*, Auckland: Auckland University Press, p.185

some things are “commonsense.”⁶³ Abel discusses the difficulty mainstream media have in covering “Maori centred news,” and the struggle which goes on in newsrooms to have the stories which their respective reporters view as worthy, heard in a competitive environment which is influenced by European news values. “Culturally astute” journalists promoting bi-cultural or Maori stories require strong advocacy skills. She concludes her book by saying:

The challenge for the future is to find methods of news reporting that reflect and acknowledge both Pakeha and Maori styles, views and perspectives; that cover ‘how’ and ‘why’ as well as the usual ‘who’ ‘when’ and ‘where’ questions; and that find favour with enough of the audience to satisfy the commercial demands of the TV channel.⁶⁴

David Robie, when he taught at the University of the South Pacific, developed a comparison between Western or First World news values and others. The traditional values developed by Galtung and Ruge are placed against the news processes of Australia, New Zealand and the US. In the second world, the “collective agitator” is at work in countries such as China, Cuba and Vietnam, and the media is more ideological and socially responsible. In the third world the media is more concerned with nation building he says, in countries such as Fiji, India, PNG and the Philippines development is news, as is national pride and achievement. The fourth world is the one which champions self-determination, and he applies this to the Australian Aboriginal Koori and the Maori. These values include an independent voice, language, culture, development, and solidarity with other indigenous minorities. This takes into account the Maori ethos of tino rangatiratanga, or self determination, which was promised Maori under the Treaty of Waitangi. (It should be noted that the actual definition of tino rangatiratanga changes depending on the perspective being applied.) Robie argues that a journalist’s job is to recount as accurately as possible the shared realities of his or her society or culture.⁶⁵

Waikato University’s Geoff Lealand also canvassed this and of 264 respondents to a survey of journalists in 2003, nine said they were thoroughly prepared to cover Maori news and

⁶³ Ibid, p.186

⁶⁴ Ibid, p.196

⁶⁶ Robie, D. (ed.) (2001) *The Pacific Journalist, A Practical Guide*, Suva: USP, p.13

issues, 91 said their preparation was adequate, 88 said neither, 55 found it inadequate and 43 said it was poor.⁶⁶

To take the cultural view outside New Zealand, the respected Australian journalism educator Michael Meadows claims that every act of journalism involves making a judgment on the significance of an event or series of events. He says the Gulf War seriously challenged journalists' ability to exercise judgment of what constituted news values.⁶⁷ He quotes Katz as observing the closer journalists got to the action the less they saw. Critical journalism was threatened by information management, instant news and empty analysis.⁶⁸

News values and objectivity

Michael King was brought up in a household where words were valued, reading encouraged and his parents entertained a variety of newsworthy people and members of the literati. All King's autobiographical pieces show that he developed an interest in politics and the political process in his teenage years and by the time he was at university he was taking a role in campus politics and writing opinion pieces. When he recounted in *Being Pakeha Now*, how this had taken him to journalism as a career he railed against tyranny over the mind as being as "iniquitous" as the tyranny that seeks to control movement and behaviour.⁶⁹ He had expected to work his way into the current affairs area of the media – not back into history.

King's time as a daily news journalist was significant for two reasons. The first because he used his skills as a writer to engage his readership in previously untold stories about Maori which would educate and inform them. Secondly he tested the boundaries of a new mind-set in New Zealand journalism – that journalists could campaign for a cause/s and be performing an educational service, not just supporting an unworthy minority. Journalists who have not been through formal training may not be aware of the Galtung and Ruge values of frequency, threshold, un-ambiguity, meaningfulness, consonance, unexpectedness, continuity, and

⁶⁶ Lealand, G. (2004) *A Survey of NZ Journalists*, Hamilton: University of Waikato, p.8

⁶⁷ Breen, M. (ed)(1998) *Journalism Theory and Practice*, Paddington: Macleay Press, p.69

⁶⁸ Ibid, p.12

⁶⁹ King, M. (1999) *Being Pakeha Now*, Auckland: Penguin Book, p.70

composition, plus references to elite nations, elite persons, personalization and negativity⁷⁰ but may find they absorb by osmosis in the newsroom. Murray Masterton in his doctoral thesis on “What Makes News” says reporters usually know this by instinct – by reaction in the gut or the intellect. But, he asks, how does such instinct develop and if and when it does why are journalists seemingly the only ones instinctively endowed? Recognising what makes news is one thing; understanding why only some information makes news when most does not is another.⁷¹ Dr Judy McGregor believes experienced journalists develop a “feel” for the newsworthy qualities of a story like a vintner develops a “nose” for good wine:

News values are one of the most opaque structures of meaning in modern society. All ‘true journalists’ are supposed to possess it; few can or are willing to identify and define it. Journalists speak of ‘the news’ as if events select themselves. Further, they speak as if which is the ‘most significant’ news story and which ‘news angles’ are most salient, are divinely inspired.⁷²

Masterton claims to have found three core elements which are absolute. They are interest, timeliness and clarity. He says if any one of the three is missing the information cannot become news in any type of publication, anywhere, anytime. There are also six major news criteria which are universal, he says. These are consequence (importance/impact), proximity, conflict, human interest, novelty, and prominence (of people). Masterton argues that the decision of what is news is largely subjective if left to journalists to decide, and the real issue could be not what is journalism, but what is being published as journalism - and why? He points out that it is not the journalists themselves who make the decisions on what appears on the pages or in the radio bulletins but the sub editors or news editors and this bring even more subjectivity to the decision, what is news?⁷³

Three different news values have been identified by James S Ettema and Theodore L Glasser, in their book *Custodians of Conscience*⁷⁴ and these were more likely to apply to King’s work as he was drawn into elevating Maori as a source of educative news stories. These values or

⁷⁰ Abel, S. (1997) *Shaping The News*, Auckland: Auckland University Press, pp.202-205

⁷¹ Breen, M. (ed) (1998) *Journalism Theory and Practice*, Paddington: Macleay Press, p.85

⁷² McGregor, J. (1991) *News Values and the Reporting of Maori News*, working paper series 91/3, Palmerston North: Massey University, p.1

⁷³ Breen, M. (ed) (1998) *Journalism Theory and Practice*, Paddington: Macleay, p.101

⁷⁴ Ettema J.S. and T.L. Glasser (1998) *Custodians of Conscience, Investigative Journalism and Public Virtue*, New York: Colombia University Press

ideals best explain the overall value of investigative reporting which differs from day-to-day newsroom journalism in that it takes a stance, or sets out to make a point. They are:

- Publicity –drawing public attention to institutional disorder which has been mostly unnoticed or concealed.
- Accountability – demanding an account of a situation from those responsible, and
- Solidarity – establishing an empathic link between those who have suffered in the situation and the rest of us.⁷⁵

In his introduction to the *Kiwi Journalist* Jim Tucker debates what editors look for in new recruits – “commitment, curiosity, writing competence, personality”. He says people who are easily polarized by issues, or those who want to change the world, or want power and influence on an ego trip ...are less likely to make it into journalism.⁷⁶ Tucker, who now heads the country’s journalism training organization, believes successful journalists all have the same basic attributes – a nose for news, the ability to spot a news story, a love of language and the ability to put it into economical use, plus being trained observers, philosophers and story tellers.⁷⁷ News values are also distilled and refined depending on the medium employing them. While the framework provided by Galtung and Ruge has proven enduring in the western world the environment and context in which a particular medium operates has a bearing on them.

Two *Washington Post* editors, Leonard Downie Jnr and Robert G. Kaiser, rewrote the manuscript of their almost-complete book, *No Good News About the News*, after the September 11 bombing of the World Trade Center, to incorporate lessons they believed the media should learn:

Good journalism holds communities together in times of crisis, providing the information and the images that constitute shared experience.⁷⁸

The value of news, or in its cruder form gossip, was not lost on Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel:

⁷⁵ Ibid, p.198

⁷⁶ Tucker, J. (1992) *Kiwi Journalist*, Auckland: Longman Paul, p.xiii

⁷⁷ Ibid p.xiv

⁷⁸ Downie Jr L. and Kaiser, R.G. (2002) ‘No Good News About The News’, *American Journalism Review*, URL:<http://www.arj.org/article> (accessed 28.10.04)

Anthropologists, comparing notes on the world's few remaining primitive cultures discovered that from the most isolated tribal areas of Africa, to islands in the Pacific the native people shared essentially the same definition of what is news? They shared the same kind of gossip. They looked for the same qualities in the people they picked to gather and deliver their news. They wanted people, who could run swiftly over the next hill, accurately gather information, and engagingly retell it. Historians believe that the same basic news values have held constant through time.⁷⁹

Kovach and Rosentiel quote a US senator who said that during his five-and-a-half years as a prisoner of war in Hanoi what he missed most was information “free, uncensored, undistorted, abundant information”. He was missing what makes the good and accurate content of daily journalism. They have called this the Awareness Instinct.⁸⁰

Veteran New Zealand radio journalist Al Morrison tackles the vexed question of what value is placed on what news items and how much objectivity is shown in that selection and the angling of the stories by the reporters. He defines objectivity this way:⁸¹

Objectivity holds that there is a truth, a reality, a set of facts that journalists pass on without their perception, feelings or opinions coloring their reports. Journalists become in a sense neutered scribes: disinterested, dispassionate observers totally unaffected by their own or anybody else's views.

Not a template against which to measure the mind-set of a young Michael King who made it clear he was looking for more from journalism than to be a mere regurgitator of detail. Morrison's views on the wider sanitizing effects of objectivity, sticking strictly to the Ws and Hs, and the inverted pyramid style story structure echo those of Jack Fuller who blames them for a loss of vigour and audience appeal in many stories. Morrison quotes Stephens on the rules of objectivity which include no personal prejudices in stories: no value-laden words, opinions to be sourced, balance and fairness are essential; and underpinning it all a

⁷⁹Kovach, B. and Rosentiel, T. (2001) 'The Elements of Journalism' *Journalism.Org*, URL:<http://www.journalism.org/resources/puvlications> (accessed 28.10.04)

⁸⁰ Kovach, B. and Rosentiel, T. (2001) 'The Elements of Journalism' *Journalism.Org*, URL:<http://www.journalism.org/resources/puvlications> (accessed 28.10.04)

⁸¹ McGregor, J. and M. Comrie (eds) (2002) *What's News*, Palmerston North: Dunmore Press, p.58

compulsion to stick to the facts.⁸² He has no argument with these and finds them a good place to start in disciplining journalists to write good factual copy, but he, like others, does not see true objectivity existing outside a vacuum.

A common exercise used in training young journalists is to get three trainees to write a story on the same incident. Invariably three different stories result. To develop that view, if three reporters were asked to nominate the three most important stories of the day to their editor, these too may be different, depending on the news topic those reporters each felt was most interesting to the readership.

Jack Fuller in *News Values, The Truth of the News* sums this up:

No one has ever achieved objective journalism and no one ever could. The bias of the observer always enters the picture, if not colouring the details at least guiding the choice of them.⁸³

He adds that the journalist who is conscious that they are failing to be objective may then try and correct themselves but this process is still subjective. Another perspective on objectivity comes from Deborah Brandt from the University of Wisconsin who quotes Cooper and Holzman as saying writing is not fundamentally a cognitive process:

Writing is located in the social world and, thus, is fundamentally structured by the shape of the environment. Context in its many forms is mediated at all levels of awareness – by the cognition of the individual writer.⁸⁴

Cooper and Holzman give us a starting point in understanding how King developed his approach to objectivity. We must not forget that he was already an academic and a historian, both disciplines calling for a factual, balanced, unskewed yet well argued thesis. When he began work for the *Waikato Times*, although he had registered there was little about Maori in the academic curriculum he had covered up until then, he knew little more than his readers. So over the three years he built his reputation as a reporter on things Maori he was taking his readers with him on his own journey of discovery. The point of difference with King's work

⁸² Ibid, p.65

⁸³ Fuller, J. (1996) *News Values*, Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, p.15

⁸⁴ Brandt, D. (1992) 'The Cognitive as the Social', *Written Communication* 9(3), pp.315-316

was that he was treating Maori as a rich source of fascinating rhetoric – most other media were treating Maori as a rich source of negative stories. Both could probably defend an objective stance in the content of their stories but the debate begins in how objective their story selection is.

Ian Stuart points out that Maori news is often not “objective” in the Pakeha sense:

...all stories are told from a particular perspective. Usually they are constructed from a Pakeha perspective. I recently heard a journalist say that objectivity did not mean assuming an objective perspective, which, he acknowledged, was impossible, but ensuring that articles present both sides of a story, that facts were collected and presented in a fair way, and that both sides of issues were canvassed and presented fairly.⁸⁵

Stuart goes on to point out that the Maori writing style differs from the Pakeha in that many Maori writers accept objectivity is impossible and do not try for it. This means many Maori news stories are written discursively. Stuart says Maori writing style can also favour the narrative, in keeping with the culturally appropriate (oral) way information has been passed on by Polynesian people for hundreds of years.

The following observations come from the writer’s own experiences working as a journalist among Maori people. The whole oral tradition in the exchange of information cannot be ignored in the objectivity debate. Maori prefer to speak face-to-face (*kanohi ki te kanohi*) They do not like to speak on the telephone and they do not like to be hurried. It is sometimes inappropriate to put the same question to a Maori person in the same form that you have put it to a Pakeha, on the same issue. The environment, the situation, may require you to rephrase it or could be ignored. You may also have to spend time talking about other issues before asking the questions pertinent to your story and some Maori would be distressed if this other information was not reported also, sometimes even in the order in which it was given – as per Ian Stuart’s reference to the discursive style. King’s personal reflections on his journey into the Maori world record how he dealt with these. He spent time with his subject, he took unobtrusive notes, he learned his *tikanga*, he explained the process he would use and he

⁸⁵ Stuart, I. (2002) Maori and Mainstream, Towards Bi-cultural Reporting., *Pacific Journalism Review*, issue number 8, p.53

engineered himself into a role at the *Waikato Times*, and later when he became self-employed, so that he could write lengthy pieces. The increase in Maori coverage and the support King was giving Maori ventures was seen as a loss of objectivity on his part by some of his colleagues at the *Waikato Times*. Ian Stuart would probably suggest that this was Pakeha objectivity at work but it became yet another reason why King wanted to become his own master.

There are two compelling examples of how King handled the need for an objective approach to an autobiography. Both involve the subject's sexual life - one Maori, one Pakeha.

When he was seeking permission from the Tainui people to write the biography of Te Puea he was asked by a Pakeha man who had been "adopted" as a son by Te Puea how he would deal with her "human side." King asked if this referred to her sexual relationships and replied:

The same way I would deal with everything else.....when something is relevant or essential to an understanding of Te Puea's character or to an understanding of the major events she was involved in - then I would include it. Where it wasn't, I wouldn't. Nothing would go into the book for prurient reasons.⁸⁶

When King wrote the autobiography of Frank Sargeson he had to confront Sargeon's homosexuality. Warwick Roger asked him how he approached this:

My rule of thumb in this matter was always to treat Frank's homosexuality in exactly the same way as I would treat another's homosexuality, no different.⁸⁷

King's mentor, Christine Cole Catley described King's ability to avoid hurt but not compromise the truth by employing "the compassionate truth"⁸⁸ – he wrote in such a way that the reader could fill in the gaps.

⁸⁶ King, M. (1999) *Being Pakeha Now*, Auckland: Penguin, p.134

⁸⁷ Roger, W. (1996) *North & South*, May, p.70

⁸⁸ Ibid

King's approach to objectivity was probably most tested during the filming and editing of the TV documentary *Tangata Whenua* and this has been discussed in the earlier section on Writing About Maori in New Zealand.

National identity

Michael King's social commentary and conscience spread far wider than developing better race relations and understanding of Maori. He wrote achingly honestly about his own struggle for identity within New Zealand, "I grew up in something of a colonial-Irish ghetto."⁸⁹

He tried to claim a place for Pakeha in New Zealand as the second indigenous race, "Pakeha New Zealanders who are committed to this land and its people are no less 'indigenous' than Maori"⁹⁰ and triggered the great debate of the 1980s, and he did what he could, personally, to assimilate into the social culture of New Zealand. Some of his best work has come out of reportage or comment on events of national importance, one of them the sinking of the Rainbow Warrior. In *Hidden Places* he devoted a whole chapter to "Rugby, Sex, Alcohol,"⁹¹ and dispelled any misconceptions that he was a bookish young scholar who had no truck with the stereotyped New Zealand males' three favourite pursuits, nor was he unaware of how strong a role they played in the national identity of the time. So King tackled rugby with the same verve and systematic application as everything else he did – he trained hard, built up his stamina, read books on strategy and his efforts were rewarded, he was promoted into a competitive school team and made a tight-head prop. This helped introduce him to girls and King deals with this part of his life, in *Hidden Places*, just as honestly as any other.

A picture of the New Zealand King grew up in is painted by Jock Phillips in the last chapter of his history of the Pakeha male – *A Man's Country*.⁹² This chapter named 'The Bloke Under Siege, 1950-95' describes the rugby-loving NZ males who flocked to watch the South African rugby team, the Springboks, play in the 1950s and many of whom turned out again to protest against the sporting-political bind of 1981. King took a role in this protest

⁸⁹ King, M. (1992) *Hidden Places*, Auckland: Sceptre, p.75

⁹⁰ King, M. (1999) *Being Pakeha Now*, Auckland: Penguin, front cover

⁹¹ Ibid p.23

⁹² Phillips, J. (1996) *A Man's Country?* Auckland: Penguin, pp262-289

way before the divisive tour and it would be one of the defining factors in his decision to leave daily journalism. Once at university he took full part in the political as well as the academic side of life and while he was working at the *Waikato Times* was also vice president of the university students' association – a role which could cause a conflict of interest, particularly if that same person was charged with the education round.

It was this kind of pressure which caused King to leave daily reportage and give himself more room to take a view about the issues of the day rather than the clinical “objective” stance which newspapers then and now expect of their staff. He credits the *Waikato Times* with being the first daily newspaper in the country to oppose New Zealand involvement in Vietnam and sporting contacting with South Africa but says this was in part due to his “vigorous arguments at editorial conferences”⁹³ for such coverage. King was also getting a strong message from some of his journalistic colleagues that his editorials regarding race relations and the promotion of Maori were “stirring up resentment.”⁹⁴ At the same time King had come under attack from the then Minister of Finance Robert Muldoon for his support of a Maori Research Centre at Waikato University. King said he had been made to feel he had pushed this issue “too vigorously for a journalist who ought to be displaying a kind of neutered detachment.”⁹⁵

A decade later in 1985 *The Listener* asked King to cover the trial of the French nationals who had been charged with bombing the Rainbow Warrior, one man died when the boat sank. Out of that trial coverage came a book, *The Death of the Rainbow Warrior*, which became an international best seller,⁹⁶ and King was applauded for his professionalism and his investigative skills⁹⁷ in producing a piece of work which once again struck a chord within a proud nation. It also demonstrated his versatility and that he had not lost any of his journalistic skills. Penguin publisher Geoff Walker said:

It was a superb piece of journalism which showed once again his ability to get on side with people, in this case the police, people he had not previously had much experience with. He developed a relationship of utmost trust with senior members of the

⁹³ King, M. (1999) *Being Pakeha Now* Auckland :Penguin, p9

⁹⁴ Ibid, p.95

⁹⁵ Ibid, p.95

⁹⁶ Roger, W. (1996) *North and South*, Michael King and the Compassionate Truth, May, p.69

⁹⁷ Robie, D. email communication 13.12.05

investigating team and as a consequence there is material in that book which no one had previously published.⁹⁸

Several writers had been a part of a scramble to get a Rainbow Warrior book out, among them veteran South Pacific journalist David Robie, who had been on the boat a few days before it was sunk. Robie is generous in his praise of King's professionalism and scathing of the other authors of books who he says used his material with little attribution.⁹⁹

Feature writing and literary journalism

Early in Michael King's journalistic career he was drawn to feature writing. He enjoyed the longer interaction with people during the interview process, the time spent on research and the licence to write longer stories. Not a man to be pigeon-holed he told interviewers he was a writer and enjoyed working in whichever genre suited the topic. He instinctively drew on his basic journalistic skills and for this reason it is not easy to identify a consistent writing style or method of composition in his longer works. Harold Evans, editor of *The Times* of London says, "people are news" and feature writing is a portrait in words.¹⁰⁰

Good feature writing is writing itself. You have to be interested in the craft of writing to be good at it, as well as a lateral thinker. This applies especially to longer feature writing.¹⁰¹

While British journalism lecturer Richard Keeble believes that direct quotes must be used to breathe life into feature profiles and to this end good feature writers must be good note-takers, he accepts the views of the writer may come through in the copy, but says the emphasis is still on news.¹⁰² New Zealand feature writer Rosemary McLeod agrees and goes

⁹⁸ Roger, W. (1996) *North and South*, Michael King and the Compassionate Truth, May, p.70

⁹⁹ Robie, D. email communication 13.12.05

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, p.236

¹⁰¹ Tucker, J. (2001) *Intro: A Guide to New Zealand Journalism*, 2nd ed, Wellington: NZJTO, p.311

¹⁰² Keeble, R. (1998) *The Newspapers Handbook*, London and New York: Routledge, p.216

further saying good feature writing requires real narrative and interpretive skills. “Without them, a long feature is nothing but a dreary print-out peppered with quotes.”¹⁰³

A study of what feature editors look for conducted over many years in Britain produced the following:

- features must be readable
- be credible
- have a grabbing intro
- involve the reader
- meet the brief, be accurate
- be well crafted
- have substance
- contain an added element of surprise.¹⁰⁴

They pointed out that in America traditionally there had been two kinds of writers of journalism – those who write news and those who write features.¹⁰⁵ News writers had not regarded themselves as writers at all but as reporters. Feature writers were not reporters, but “writers, who have been expected to be sensitive and creative.” But, they said, the best writers were the best observers and this bred the kind of accuracy which came from close observation, then clear and careful writing to reduce misunderstanding.¹⁰⁶

In the United States in the 1960s New Journalism was making a mark. Described as writing akin to a “non fiction novel” this form of journalism saw reporters take some of the techniques previously used by novelists and, claims leading proponent, Tom Wolfe, beat the novelists at their own game.¹⁰⁷ Wolfe said that journalists, by trial and error, began to discover the devices that gave the realistic novel its unique power, “immediacy, emotional involvement, or absorbing qualities.” He challenged the non-compromising edicts of punctuation with his “lavish use of dots, dashes, exclamation marks, italics and so on as essentially FUN.”

¹⁰³ Ibid, p311

¹⁰⁴ Hicks, W. et al (1999) *Writing for Journalists*, London and New York: Routledge, p.48

¹⁰⁵ Ibid, p.10

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, p.12

¹⁰⁷ Wolfe, T (1975) *The New Journalism*, London: Picador, p.46

I figured it was time someone violated what Orwell called ‘the Geneva conventions of the mind’ ...a protocol which had kept journalism and non fiction generally (and novels) in such a tedious bind for so long.¹⁰⁸

He analysed the four key devices of The New Journalism as:

- witnessing other people’s lives scene-by-scene,
- recording the dialogue which took place in full (he says this establishes and defines the character more quickly and effectively than any other single device);
- taking “third person point of view” which presents the scene through the eyes of a particularly character;
- and is recording in detail gestures, habits, mannerisms, customs, behaviour, or what Wolfe calls a person’s status life.

This thumbnail description of Wolfe’s view of the New Journalism – a kind of Charles Dickens meets fly-on-the-wall – could be explained by the adage that truth is more amazing than fiction.

King steered well clear of the New Journalism but he told journalist, Warwick Roger he did write some short fiction in the early 1970s and though it was published, he realized he did not have a gift for what he called “imaginative writing”:

But I do try and write history with the apparatus of a novelist, looking for the things that work in a narrative sense, to open a window to the subject to haul the reader through. To me it’s more important that a book is a good read than it is for it to be on a ‘significant subject’. There are plenty of unread books on ‘significant’ subjects.¹⁰⁹

New Journalism has spawned another genre, Literary Journalism, which better describes some of King’s work when he left daily reportage and began writing features about people, then moved into writing about Maori life and culture. He freely admitted that the techniques of Hemingway and other classical authors had flowed in to his writing and he took the lessons he learned from writing the “people pieces” for the *Waikato Times* forward into his books.

¹⁰⁸ Hicks, W et al (1999) *Writing for Journalists*, London and New York: Routledge, p.131

¹⁰⁹ Roger, W. (1996) *North and South*, May, p.75

Literary journalism is, says one of its practitioners Norman Sims, “immersion reporting, narrative techniques that free the voice of the writer, and high standards of accuracy.”¹¹⁰ Sims, in his introduction to a collection of literary journalism pieces written by American authors describes how the technique has grown to allow the author to enter the story, add his voice, and to focus on ordinary lives, rather than those of elite subjects which daily journalism favours. While the present-day model has evolved out the more flamboyant New Journalism, writers such as Daniel Defoe and Dr Samuel Johnson are now credited to have used the technique in the eighteenth century, and Mark Twain followed in the nineteenth. It is thanks to Twain that many school children around the world have learned what everyday life was like in the deep South of the United States. Young adults who read John Steinbeck’s work *The Grapes of Wrath*, have learned more about the great depression and the plight of migrant workers moving across the dustbowl of America and through his essays Ernest Hemingway has demonstrated mastery of the narrative. It is well documented that all these authors were avidly read by King. He admits in biographical musings about his own early life that he based high school essays on the form and structure of authors such as Hemingway. It is unsurprising then to see that this technique re-emerges in his feature writing and later his books.

Not all literary journalists have come to the genre through daily reporting. Mark Kurlansky attended the Auckland Writers and Readers Festival in 2005 and in an interview with Carroll du Chateau in the *NZ Herald* described how he began his literary career as a playwright and later became a journalist for the *Chicago Tribune* where he honed his literary skills and eye for detail before moving into fiction. He said:

Theatre training teaches you how to tell stories, how to create characters, how to set scenes. Journalism teaches you how to make your deadlines, how to find things out, how to get into places... and how to tell when people are lying to you. They’re tremendous skills.¹¹¹

One of the sub-elements of literary journalism is immersion reporting where, for example, a writer follows the practitioner of a certain profession for a long period of time then records

¹¹⁰ Sims N. and Kramer M. (eds) (1995) *Literary Journalism*, Ballantine: New York, p.3

¹¹¹ Du Chateau, C. (2005) Exploring Cod, Salt and Life in New York, *NZ Herald*, May 10, p.A7

what they have observed. Others join a sports team or live in a remote area to observe how its inhabitants survive, and others, like Michael King immerse themselves in a culture. “Literary journalists hang out with their sources for months and even years. It’s a reward – and risk – of the trade, as I’ve discovered on many projects,” says Mark Kramer.¹¹² He quotes fellow author Henry James who said it was important the writer “felt life”:

It (immersion journalism) shoulders right on past official or bureaucratic explanations for things. It leaves quirks and self-deceptions, hypocrisies and graces intact, and exposed, in fact it uses them to deepen understanding.¹¹³

Kramer says the journalist who has been immersed then writes with “humanity, poise and relevancethis is a beguiling, approachable, unreachable goal.”¹¹⁴ He describes the relationship between the writer and his subjects as something which develops for both parties, something like a partnership or friendship, if not quite like marriage:

The ticklish questions the writer comes up against are these: Does the subject see himself revealing information to a friend at the same moment the writer sees himself hearing information from a source? And how responsible is the writer for the consequences of such perceptions?¹¹⁵

More recently tensions have developed around writing for, from within, or about cultures other than one’s own, and the relationships which have developed while doing so. King’s time immersing himself, whenever possible, in the Maori world, and forging lifelong links, trustworthy sources, and deep friendships lead him into trouble, hurt and self-imposed exile. Martin Bell coined his phrase “the journalism of attachment” to relate to war reporting. John Pilger does not believe a journalist can cover issues relating to an oppressed people without feeling personally for them and their issues but the views of both men can be applied to King in his “Maori period.” Rukhsana Khan, a Pakistani award-winning author says:

Many mainstream authors felt that doors were being closed to them because they weren’t from the culture they were writing about. The merit of the work was not always a factor, rather they felt it was a case of reverse discrimination. Whereas

¹¹² Ibid, p.22

¹¹³ Ibid. p.23

¹¹⁴ Ibid. p.23

many ethnic authors, felt that an author foreign to their cultural traditions did not have the familiarity and respect to do their culture justice. Some felt that mainstream authors were ‘honing in on their territory’ – as if one’s culture amounted to a piece of turf that has to be protected from invasion.¹¹⁶

She was not, but Khan could have been speaking of King and the controversy which grew up when he wrote a significant body of work about Maori.

Mark Kramer has drawn together a number of rules for literary journalists. His second deals, with the implicit covenants literary journalists must work out about accuracy and candor with readers and with sources. This must translate to credibility, a quality any journalist, literary or otherwise, strives to maintain in order to stay in business.

Kramer’s other rules suggest:

- literary journalists write mostly about routine events;
- write in an “intimate” voice, informal, frank, human and ironic;
- the style of the writing is plain and spare, “elegant simple expression is the goal”;
- the stance is disengaged and mobile, so the authors can turn and address his audience directly;
- structure counts mixing primary narrative with tales and digressions to amplify and reframe events;
- and finally the writers take their audience along with them entertaining and informing them.¹¹⁷

Several of these “rules” cut across the Galtung and Ruge scale of values. Literary journalists focus on anti-eliteness, frequency and negativity are not important, and the size of an event does not make it any better, or at least that was King’s style. He could have written a worthy volume on the rise of the Kingitanga movement in the Waikato. He was well qualified. But he did not. Instead he researched a woman called Te Puea, described by John Pocock as “probably the most influential woman in our political history”¹¹⁸ yet largely ignored by

¹¹⁵ Ibid, p.26

¹¹⁶ Rukhsana, K. (2000) “Voice Appropriate and Writing for Another Culture’ *Rukhsanakhan. com* URL: <http://www.rukhsanakhan.com/article-voiceapp.htm>, (accessed 13.05.05)

¹¹⁷ Sim, N. and Kramer, M. (eds) (1995) *Literary Journalism*, New York: Ballantine Books pp.23-33

¹¹⁸ King, M. (1999) *Being Pakeha Now*, Auckland: Penguin p.129

historians up until then. His credentials within Tainui were already good, but he had to go through an even more thorough “vetting” process to win permission, starting with the Maori Queen, before he was ever allowed to embark on the book. Over the years King researched and wrote about Te Puea, both for his doctoral thesis and a subsequent book. He spent thousands of hours with her descendants and those who could supply information about her. Again he took with him what he had learned at the *Waikato Times* – patience, respect for the people and the project, and impeccable interviewing, research and note taking skills.

In this context literary journalism may also embrace ethnographic journalism. This is described by Janet M Cramer and Michael McDevitt as being primarily concerned with uncovering meanings – in particular the meanings inherent to a particular group and its practices. They quote Lindlof as defining the root meanings of the words “ethno” as people and “graphy” describing.”¹¹⁹ They caution that ethnographic journalism or “social immersion” could be seen to violate the traditional concept of objectivity as detachment from sources or subjects. There is an expectation in this kind of immersion reporting that the journalist lives, observes and even joins in the occupation of the group of people he is studying. In fact it is viewed as a form of social science rather than journalism by some. Cramer and McDevitt have devoted a paper to the ethics of ethnography and how both recorder (reporter) and subjects (a community) can be protected from suggestions of bias, breach of privacy, loss of objectivity, levels at detachment as generally expected of a journalist. They suggest:

Autonomous reporters would realize that to pursue ethnographic journalism, they must in some ways transcend not only professional conventions and reporting habits but also their own demographic profiles. As a first step, Durham advocates ‘strong objectivity’, in which journalists would approach reporting from the vantage point of marginalized groups to counterbalance the dominant perspectives of mainstream news media. This approach becomes problematic, to say the least, in the light of formal education, training, and professional socialization that positions many reporters closer to the insider views of dominant groups than the views of the disadvantaged or the politically disengaged.¹²⁰

¹¹⁹ Cramer J. and McDevitt M. (2003) ‘Ethnographic Journalism’. In S.H. Oorio (ed.) *Qualitative Research in Journalism*, pp.127-144, New York: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates

In fact Cramer and McDevitt advance an argument that ethnography provides a very strong platform for objectivity through the accuracy with which the ethnographic reporter describes the setting in which they are observing. They also point out that ethnographers are often perceived to have a commitment to portraying people and perspectives usually ignored in the mainstream media. This is in contrast to the other role of ethnographic reporters – to expose corruption. It is also generally accepted that the ethnographer will not impose their views/experience/knowledge on to their subjects or the environment in which they are observed. This is at odds with the training of a journalist or an academic who goes into each piece of work with copious amounts of research. Cramer and McDevitt have quoted Steinar Kvale’s analogy of the ethnographic reporter as opposed to the regular interview. Kvale likens the interviewer to a “miner” who digs out nuggets of information, along with lively quotes because the source is used essentially to extract information. But a “traveler” (ethnographer) wanders without a map and asks questions that lead to subjects talking about their own world. There are precedents for ethnographic reporting and literary journalism to overlap: Sims and Kramer are two practitioners who have used both methods along with strong narrative. King’s ability to portray a people, or a group of people honestly and accurately but with empathy, led to him being asked to write the history of the Moriori by its Chatham Island descendents. Again he immersed himself in their culture and their environment to better understand them as a people and it took him three years to write the book.

As Jock Phillips put it “The relationship would begin, the intelligent sympathetic probing would follow, then came the book.”¹²¹ Summed up best by King himself, he said in *Hidden Places*:

The type of journalism to which I’ve always been drawn most strongly is the profile: stories about people set in the context of their time and their activities. These features, involving as they do the evocation of character and mannerism, are satisfying to write. They are also the most widely read: people are most interested in people.¹²²

¹²⁰ Ibid, p.6

¹²¹ Phillips, J. (2004) *New Zealand Books*, Vol 134, p.3

¹²² King, M. (1992) *Hidden Places*, Sceptre: Auckland, p.178

The media view of King

King is depicted in a number of ways by the media. The descriptions are contextual depending on which role he was taking and generally they are flattering. Most portray a large, bearded man, very funny, very unassuming, but very intelligent and unaffected by academia. The opposing disciplines of King the historian and King the journalist/popular writer frequently provided an angle for interviewers and commentators. King gave numerous interviews and supported his books with the normal amount of media promotion but it was not until his sudden death that the media responded with any real analysis of the man, what had guided him, and to what heights.

By way of an obituary the Auckland City Libraries posted this tribute on their website, written by David Heritage. It read:

Following university King was first a successful journalist, and his writings continued to combine academic studies of people and places and themselves in New Zealand history with a journalist's ease of communication to everyday readers. King became a trusted 'brand name' with anything written by him avidly picked up by the general public. They were rarely disappointed.¹²³

When the Evening Standard in the Manawatu wrote its obituary of King, staff reporters interviewed a number of people. These included literature expert William Broughton who described King as a "very humane writer" who could write in such a way that he could inform without patronising. He talked about how King made significant history (Maori and Pakeha) accessible through his style of writing.¹²⁴ A colleague from King's journalism days, Dr Judy McGregor said in the same story that King's early journalism had provided a foundation for his later writing.¹²⁵ Danny Butt, an Auckland academic reflected on his website: "Much is made of King's 'turning his back on the academy' in order to write for a 'general audience'."¹²⁶ He argued that academics were contained in their own world and by

¹²⁴ Obituary (2004) 'Literary Lion Lost Say Massey Academics', *Manawatu Evening Standard*, March 31, p.1

¹²⁵ Ibid

¹²⁶ Butt, D. (2004) 'A Reflection on Michael King Obituaries', *Danny Butt.net*, URL: www.dannybutt.net/king (accessed 23.04.05)

remaining outside the university system King had stayed untainted by the “plague of terrible, jargon-infested prose that the academy produces’. Butt ameliorates this by saying some clear and elegant writing is produced by academics, but, he said it made more sense to see King not as turning away from “bad writing” but rather from the professional discussion which goes on among historians about how to write history. He makes the point that King's significant work began when he was a journalist and in the end he chose to be a journalist rather than a historian. Geoff Walker was frequently King’s publisher and a friend from their student days. He was interviewed on TVNZ’s Holmes show on March 31, 2004 and said King was “from academia but not of academia.” In the same interview Patu Hohepa, Maori language commissioner, said King preferred to spend time out talking and writing about people rather than in intense academic discussions. Hohepa said King was a modest writer who wrote clearly and lucidly and did not go for big words and deep theories. “He just wrote what he thought.”¹²⁷

Michael King and the *NZ Listener* had a long association. King wrote many book reviews for *The Listener* and in Graeme Lay’s tribute following his death Lay talked about handling a piece of King’s work for an anthology “there was almost no editing involved, every sentence, every paragraph was perfectly calibrated....” He added that King was one of those rare writers who could express himself verbally with a fluency that equaled his literary ability:

Everything Michael wrote was of the highest standard. His work was lucid, direct, perceptive and totally without affectation. Even when grievously ill he never failed to meet a deadline.¹²⁸

Peter Beatson wrote a less favourable piece for *Landfall* in 1999. He reviewed *The Red Heart* by Rosie Scott, *Being Pakeha Now: Reflections and Recollections of a White Native*, by Michael King and *Rights of Passage: Beyond the New Zealand Identity Crisis*, by Chris Laidlaw.¹²⁹ Beatson deemed Rosie Scott’s *Red Heart* as the “most modest in conception but the best executed when judged by its stylistic quality and the finesse of its thought. He was

¹²⁷ Holmes, P. (2004) ‘The Author Who Didn’t Tangle Prose’ (radio interview transcript), *thebigidea* URL: www.thebigidea.co.nz (accessed 27.07.04)

¹²⁸ Lay, G. (2004) ‘Michael King and Maria Jungowska, A Tribute’, *NZ Listener*, April 10-16, 193:3335, URL; www.thelistener.co.nz/default (accessed 10/09/04)

¹²⁹ Beatson, P. (1999) ‘Reviews’, *Landfall* 198 (Spring), 7:2

impressed by a “fresh engaging speaking voice throughout,” and commended it to *Landfall* readers.¹³⁰ He was less impressed with *Being Pakeha Now* and commented that several notable New Zealanders had published updates of their autobiographies, but he knew of no one, other than King, who published the same one twice. This refers to the earlier, *Being Pakeha*, which King updated to *Being Pakeha Now*. He was also critical of the book’s “lack of academic substance”, and failure to address the tensions between Maori and Pakeha over crucial aspects of the Treaty of Waitangi. He concluded his review by saying he felt the book was “stuck in a time warp.”¹³¹ Chris Laidlaw’s *Right of Passage* impressed Beatson much more. While he saw some parallels with King’s book and described Laidlaw’s as a “rambling, shambling, garrulous affair” structurally, he preferred it of the three as being less solemn.¹³² *Being Pakeha Now* also drew comment from Jonathon Milne, in Wellington’s *The Dominion* in May 1999 when Milne speculated that King had brought any controversy surrounding the book upon himself, hinting at the success of “white backlash” books in New Zealand at the time as a motivator, “King, a former journalist, seems to be wooing that market with the title of his new book, *Being Pakeha Now*.”¹³³

Milne revisited the earlier controversies surrounding King when he wrote about Maori people and issues only to be called an “academic raider...”, and “A bloody Pakeha who’s too arrogant to know he’s overstepped the mark.”¹³⁴ Such reactions are grist to the mill of a seasoned journalist who revels in reaction. But it is well documented that King was personally very hurt and drew back from writing about Maori with few exceptions until his death. A decade later *Tread Softly For You Tread On My Life: New and Collected Writings* by Michael King, was met more kindly by reviewers who were impressed, among other things, with his ability, as a biographer, to deliver the “compassionate truth.”¹³⁵ Reviewer Dorothy Alexander said this ability, as it was described by his publisher Christine Cole Catley, had enabled him to approach a wide range of subjects, both Maori and Pakeha and have them trust him absolutely. King, like many journalists, had to learn to walk a fine line – how far to go to maintain the trust of a subject without losing the objectivity required by the profession.

¹³⁰ Ibid, p.329

¹³¹ Ibid, p.332

¹³² Ibid, pp.332-333

¹³³ Milne, J. (1999) ‘The Rise and Rights of White Natives’, *The Dominion*, May 12, edition 2, p.11

¹³⁴ Ibid. p.11

King's own view of his work

The best autobiographical insight into King can be found in his book, *Hidden Places*, which he called a *Memoir in Journalism*. In the introduction he explained the title came from an editorial he wrote for the *Waikato Times* in which he said the role of a journalist was above all else:

...to disclose, to shed light on *Hidden Places*, to let society see what was going on in its own dark corners. If the press was doing its job properly, readers would never be wholly surprised by anything that occurred. Their journalists would have warned them and prepared them for the seismic upheavals that periodically disrupt politics and public affairs, and for the more subtle shifts in values and attitudes which can escape casual attention but which ultimately are part of the re-shaping of societies.¹³⁶

He said this was the role he tried to carry out as a journalist and as a teacher of journalism. King admitted in the same introduction that a newspaper executive once queried whether he was “too much of an academic” to write a training book, but when he was seeking funding for a biography an academic tried to warn the publisher off saying “he is only a journalist.” He had never seen the roles of journalist, author, historian, and academic as contradictory. “A writer is a writer, is a writer,” he claimed, but the most fundamental role for him was journalism:

The skills one learns there – awareness of readers, the need to make words proximate, relevant and clear, the ability to meet deadlines – all these constitute the best possible apprenticeship for other forms of writing. I am proud to have been – and to be – a journalist.¹³⁷

He told *The Listener* in 2003 that his years as a journalist had instilled in him some practical disciplines:

¹³⁵ Alexander, DS. (2002) ‘Riveting Read from Michael King’, *The Evening Standard*, Sept 17, edition 2, p.22

¹³⁶ King, M. (1992) *Hidden Places, A Memoir In Journalism*, Auckland: Sceptre, p.1

¹³⁷ Ibid. p.2

Nobody who's been a journalist just sits and stares at a blank page for three days. You just sit down and start writing. You also write with an audience in mind, which an awful lot of academics don't do.¹³⁸

King may have started out as a journalist and credited that profession with teaching him many basic skills but journalism and words were not always enough for him. The television series *Tangata Whenua* grew, he said, out of a need for more than he could draw on as a newspaper journalist and a writer to represent emotionally charged situations such as tangi, oratory, argument.¹³⁹ He needed the added dimension of film. He moved into television and his work was largely well-received but later in the same book he talked of the relief when *Tangata Whenua* was over.

When Michael King was criticised by some Maori for seeking to represent aspects of Maoridom, through a variety of medium he responded to the grumblings by arguing for the informed writer who could represent a culture well no matter what his own ethnicity. "This is as ridiculous as saying that a person can automatically write well about Pakeha or European things because he is a Pakeha."¹⁴⁰ However as Robert Mannion pointed out in *Metro* magazine in 1984, King's books were also addressing a Maori readership. King told him:

I felt it was very urgent that Maori views should be communicated to a wider audience. And that is all I have ever sought to do. I've never set myself up as an expert on Maori history. I don't feel I can grab a Maori person and say 'this is your history you ought to read it.' But I am a Pakeha – I feel I can go to another Pakeha of a similar background to myself and say: 'Look: we are part of a culture that tore Maori culture to shreds, we ought to be aware of the consequences of that.'¹⁴¹

In his view what qualified a person to do these things was not ethnic make-up, but how much relevant experience that person had, how much sympathy he possessed, how well he could interview, research and write; and the degree to which he was interested enough to write.

¹³⁸ Matthews, P. (2003) 'Michael King', *NZ Listener*, URL: <http://www.listener.co.nz/default.880.879.1.sm> (accessed 23/06/04)

¹³⁹ King, M. (1992) *Hidden Places, A Memoir In Journalism*, Auckland: Sceptre, p.87

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.p.96

¹⁴¹ Mannion, R. (1984) 'Michael King: A Pakeha Writer Meets the Maori Renaissance' *Metro*, October, p.104

It is the view of many journalists that opinion piece writers, film makers and television presenters who lay claim to the practice of journalism are not well regarded by those who have done their time in real newsrooms around the country and have felt the associated strains, pressures and stresses which daily journalism brings, as King had. Later he admitted he most missed the adrenaline rush of immediate events, interrogating people, and beating deadlines when he left newspaper journalism.¹⁴² But he acknowledged that the kind of journalism he was drawn to most strongly was profile writing:

These features, involving as they do the evocation of character and mannerism, are satisfying to write....people are most interested in people.¹⁴³

Michael King was one of New Zealand's most prolific authors and writers. He could have returned to journalism or academia at any time yet he chose not to. But in 2002 he told reporter Dorothy Wharehoka that he had become a "word machine", every idea he had for a piece of writing had to have the potential to make him money.¹⁴⁴

Conclusion

Writing has two hallmarks which make it "good," and good writing and good journalistic writing have much in common though good journalism goes some steps further. These are demonstrated in Models A and B (see Appendix).

The first hallmark can be seen in the works of acknowledged great writers of English, such as William Hazlett, George Orwell, Ernest Hemingway, Rudyard Kipling. All agree on the same basic rules. These are: simple words, clarity, correct spelling and punctuation, appropriate sentence length, using the active rather than passive voice, and avoidance of clichés and jargon. Added to this is a need to write and rewrite to hone and finely craft a piece of work. These could be described as the technical requirements of good writing. They are basic, essential and are as applicable today as they were at the start of the 20th century. The second

¹⁴² King, M. *Hidden Places*, A Memoir In Journalism, (1992) Auckland: Sceptre, p155

¹⁴³ Ibid p.178

¹⁴⁴ Wharehoka, D. (2002) 'Michael King, Living In Harmony', *Hauraki Herald*, Jan. 25

hallmark involves the writer, yet is to some extent is out of that writer's hands. It is that intangible element which writers such as Goethe, Mencken, Shadbolt or Stead have identified as an ability to breathe life into words; to make Stead's "verbal music" or to use a pen rather than "more forceful means" to change the views in a diverse country as Ihimaera would do; and to capture hearts as well as minds as some claim King did in an attempt to bring better understanding between cultures both philosophically and politically. It would appear this cannot be taught or learned from a text book. It cannot be achieved by following a set of rules, or even by breaking them as the New Journalism does, but it cannot stand alone without the structure of those technical rules and conventions of good writing. Some elements of this hallmark are identified in Model B and some are in Model C as personal drivers. The two hallmarks are distinctly different yet co-dependent in the execution of what we call, simply, good writing.

William E Blundell has advanced one of the best descriptions of how this happens. He describes the "mean storyteller" as two people, acting alternately as he works:

The first is the sensitive artist-creator, the second a savage critic, who eradicates every weakness in the creation. He's cruel, derisive and obsessively demanding. He hoots at the writer's affectations and pretty turns of phrase, blisters him for cowardice when he uses soft, passive constructions or hedges on conclusions, challenges every point of logic, demands sound reasons for the presence of every character and fact and above all flagellates his victim for wordiness. He is a rotten S.O.B. worse than any editor who ever drew breathe, and he is the artist's best friend.¹⁴⁵

King's editors, his colleagues and his publishers will show later in this thesis that both Blundell's people were alive and well in the work of Michael King. They will confirm that his writing style, his mastery of the English language and his ability to use it to draw pictures of past and present was excellent. That King was a diligent self-editor will be confirmed and his students also talk of a teaching style which re-inforced his technique.

¹⁴⁵Adam, G. S. (2004) 'Notes Towards a Definition of Journalism', *poynter online*, URL: www.poynter.org/media/product/20020728 (accessed 5.01.05)

In good journalism news values are shown to be largely contextual as suggested by Robie, Stuart and Brandt. Galtung and Ruge's nine values serve the newspapers and television stations of the western world. They provide the framework and to some extent the justification for the way news is accessed and covered. However cultural proximity and relevance may be starting to impact on mainstream media in New Zealand. Robie has demonstrated tensions between Galtung and Ruge's values as they are applied throughout the world. His four-world philosophy moves from the Galtung and Ruge model in the first world, to the championing of a minority culture by the media in a particular country in the fourth. Interest, timeliness and clarity are the essential values promoted by Masterton, while Ettema and Glasser's values for investigative reporting suggest journalists should be encouraged to push for society's truths and these sit better as drivers for King's work.

Objectivity is largely a subjective concept in the hands of journalists and writers from a variety of races, colour and creeds. Most of the views canvassed on objectivity, from experienced journalists to sociologists and academics concur that true objectivity is impossible to achieve outside a vacuum. Martin Bell with his *journalism of attachment* has attempted to legitimize the right of a journalist, particularly one reporting on conflict, to care. He claims it is impossible not to. Lealand's survey and the comments of Ranginui Walker would support the view that if a country's media is dominated by reporters with a set of values and beliefs based on one kind of upbringing these will be evident in their work, intentionally or otherwise.

However, Tucker and Abel both challenge New Zealand journalists to do better in their reporting of Maori issues and affairs, this is not seen as a loss of objectivity but a need for better understanding of a bigger picture before an attempt at objectivity. They do not support negative reporting in the guise of being objective if it is not based on knowledge of the subject – a further requirement of "good writing".

As the world starts to embrace multiculturalism, and New Zealand bi-culturalism, there is also emerging acceptance of a micro-climate of objectivity within a contextually subjective topic. In New Zealand that could be, as Robie points out, self determination and nationhood offered as good journalism in a fair, balanced and clear manner among a wider commentary of New Zealand's government.

King used a number of techniques in his post-journalism writing. One was to write several books in the first person – not normally a trademark of objectivity – but he wanted to engage his audience from a real-person position in rhetoric that would start healthy national debate. In other books he portrayed a culture which had, until this time, been largely subjugated, and he wrote books which were commentaries of the time in the narrative voice.

Michael King was too intelligent to employ haphazard methodology to his writing. He may have started his work among Maori to tap into stories which were untold by journalists yet they contained significant history and were well written and attracted readers. When brought down to the most basic common denominator, Michael King had to have executed good writing because it was read. It was read by people up and down New Zealand who took heed of it and allowed it to have a bearing on their lives.

Chapter 3 – Research methodology

Introduction

Evaluating the appropriate forms of research methodology for this thesis it became clear that no single method could be used.

Had King still been alive a life story interview could have been appropriate, but this would be largely biographical and highly marketable therefore King may not have co operated. It is worth noting that King used Maori political figure Princess Te Puea and combined her life story with a measure of ethnography to produce both a D.Phil. thesis and a book which was acclaimed by reviewers and fellow academics. Professor James Ritchie who was one of King's thesis supervisors notes that particular methodology (ethnography) did not sit well with the University of Waikato where King studied in the mid 1970s. In order to allow the D.Phil to go ahead it had to be awarded in the discipline of psychology (Ritchie's own department).¹⁴⁶

The method of research in this thesis is similarly non-conforming but follows in the main the methodology of qualitative research. In considering qualitative research Robert B. Burns says:

During the late 1960s and throughout the decade of the 1970s a new, critical form of inquiry began to emerge. A more diffuse recognition of the implicit relationship between knowledge and human interest led to the advocacy of an alternative, more humanistic paradigm. This paradigm is based on the concept of *verstehen*, a form of subjective understanding. In current research, movements towards humaneness are based on a recognition of the need for critical inquiry and meaning in educational action. The traditional emphasis on 'factual' knowledge and singular truth has become obsolete as the avenues for knowledge generation and cultural exchange increase. The qualitative researcher attempts to gather evidence which will reveal qualities of life, reflecting the 'multiple realities' of specific educational settings from participants' perspectives.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁶ Professor James Ritchie, telephone interview, 27.07.05

¹⁴⁷ Burns, R.B. (1999) *Introduction To Research Methods*, 4th ed, NSW: Longman, p.388

Similarly Burns says the literature review in qualitative research is a stimulus for the researcher's thinking and not a way of summarizing the work which can blind the researcher to only considering existing systems. In order to form some conclusions on how Michael King moved from journalist to writer and communicator, what equipped him to work in these areas, and whether he did it well, there were three sources of available data.

One was a study of King's own writing about his professional life until the time of his death. The second was to interview people who had employed, worked with, worked for, studied under, and known Michael King through the various stages, or all, of his working life. The third was to gather secondary source data which had been published about King and his work during and after his death.

Under-pinning this research is a review of the literature pertaining to "good writing" and good journalism against which to measure King's work at the various stages of his career and to highlight the defining factors in the various genre he used. The first and third sources of data are satisfied by a review of the literature by and about King. The second involved what Burns describes as "unstructured interviewing" (though in the case of this thesis there was some structure provided by one question common to every interview):

As well as participant observation, unstructured and semi-structured interviews are other major tools in the qualitative researcher's pack. Accounts derived from interviews are studied for themes. This data is reported as narrative containing direct quotations from interview statements, field-notes etc. This illustrative data provides a sense of reality, describing exactly what the informant feels, perceives, and how they behave.¹⁴⁸

Burns goes on to describe an interview as a verbal exchange, often face-to-face, though the telephone may be used, in which an interviewer tries to elicit information, beliefs, or opinions from another person.

He has broken this down into more specific forms of interviewing and the one which has been used most frequently in this study is the semi-structured interview. On this he says:

¹⁴⁸ Ibid, p.423

An interview guide may be developed for some parts of the study in which, without fixed wording or fixed ordering of questions, a direction is given to the interview so that the content focuses on the crucial issues of the study.¹⁴⁹

How the methodology has been applied

The review of King's writing about himself, and that of others' about his work has been conducted as a straightforward research project. The internet, books, magazines and television documentaries have all been used to provide the data. The interviews have in some cases been based on comments derived from the literary research and in others a primary source has been interviewed to describe a particular period of King's life, or to discuss his style of writing and work. The methods used to conduct the interviews have been face-to-face, via email, and by telephone. They have been semi-structured in that one question is asked at the start of every interview:

“Do you believe that the time Michael King spent as a journalist helped him to become the writer and communicator he later became?”

Interviewees were encouraged to put this question in the context of their own knowledge of King, their particular area of expertise as applied to journalism or writing, and then offer additional information relating to King's time as a journalist, based largely on observations.

Areas specifically canvassed as a result of the findings of the literature review were: King's interviewing skills; his method of rapport building; his journalistic writing skills; his objectivity/subjectivity; his attitude to deadlines; his brevity and conciseness of writing; his accuracy; and his style of writing. The 18 people interviewed have fallen into two categories: those who felt comfortable talking about Michael King and were happy to contribute and speak honestly; and those who felt uncomfortable talking objectively about someone who was highly admired and recently deceased, they demurred initially but when given some time to adjust to the request were happy to answer the question. Only one person refused, citing pressure of work. He is on record as being critical of King's writing relating to Maori. The rest were representative of those who worked with, employed King in some way, were

¹⁴⁹ Ibid, p.424

acknowledged literary reviewers, or knew King. They include: colleagues and superiors at the *Waikato Times*, fellow students, a school teacher and an academic supervisor, fellow academics, students of King's, fellow tutors, other writers in New Zealand, and two of his book editors.

It must be accepted that much of the primary data gathered from people in an interview situation is highly subjective. It must also be acknowledged that there was an unspoken but implicit reluctance to "speak ill of the dead" in some cases, and some interviewees initially felt they were not qualified to comment on the work of one of New Zealand's leading writers.

Chapter 4 – Michael King

Michael King was one of New Zealand's most versatile literary figures. While a number of leading New Zealand and overseas writers have started out as journalists learning their craft in newsrooms writing against the pressure of deadlines and irascible editors King firstly became an academic who could write, and then a journalist. He would not compromise his attention to detail or a story structure which favoured the denouement rather than the inverted pyramid style under the pressure of those deadlines. Nor would he place himself above the advice of notoriously direct and intransigent sub editors but took their direction with good grace and moved on.

This was one of King's strengths. He was open to learning. He did not spurn criticism and welcomed engagement with his readership, but he was eventually placed in a position where it was not the calibre of his writing which was brought into question, but the topics he was writing about.

As a reviewer he passed comment on the work of his peers and he did not spare those who compromised truth nor fact. After his death the obituary writers praised his accuracy and his diligence as a researcher but this was not always the case. Reviewers of King's own work found it wanting at times, rarely for its literary merit but more for its depth of interpretation and its completeness. It was King's actual writing, the words on paper which were rarely faulted.

The first section of this chapter examines King's journalism in more detail and identifies the factors which contributed to his later writing.

King – newspaper journalist

Michael King was not an experienced journalist in newspaperman's terms. His one fulltime long-term job as a general reporter was with the *Waikato Times*. In *Being Pakeha Now* he recalls the decision to go into journalism:

What could be more important, I wondered, than being part of the media which provide the data and the perspectives by which individuals and communities make their social and political decisions? Paradoxically, however, and contrary to my expectations at the time, that decision did not lead me into a more intimate engagement with current affairs: it led me back to history.¹⁵⁰

One of King's mentors, Professor James Ritchie does not believe the importance of what he calls King's "apprenticeship" at the *Waikato Times* is sufficiently well recorded:

The apprenticeship at the *Waikato Times* was extremely important. There he had to perform to the standards he set himself which came out of the basic humaneness of a Catholic upbringing and his own ethics.¹⁵¹

Professor Ritchie said he felt this apprenticeship was important for King, not because he needed to write for mentors or for readership but rather because of an inner directed need to perform to his own expectations. Those who worked at the *Times* at that time recall heady, ground-breaking days of scoops and investigations, and licence from the editorial management to push the boundaries. It was a spawning ground for some of the country's best journalists: Judy McGregor, who went on to become a Professor of Journalism at Massey University; Warwick Roger, one-time editor of *Metro*; Venetia Sherson, later editor of the *Waikato Times*; Richard Long, an editor of *The Dominion*; and Margaret Evans, who was later to become mayor of Hamilton.

Margaret Evans said at that time the *Waikato Times* was one of the best newspapers in the country. The newsroom was filled with very young but very gifted people. It was a dynamic place to work. The paper looked nationally and globally for its stories and the opportunity to localize them. She believed in many ways the journalists who worked there in the 1970s were pioneers of a new kind of journalism where feature writing and in-depth work were encouraged and Michael King and his enthusiasm for the Maori round were embraced. (He was employed to do education).¹⁵² Warwick Roger said another unusual aspect of the newsroom at that time was that it was employing "academics" – people who had come to

¹⁵⁰ King, M. (1999) *Being Pakeha Now*, Auckland: Penguin Books p.70

¹⁵¹ Prof James Ritchie, telephone interview, 20.07.05

¹⁵² Margaret Evans, telephone interview, 12.01.05

journalism with a degree. Himself, Michael King and Judy McGregor were viewed as a little different, “more intellectual” than the average journalist. They entered the newsroom on a higher grading than other journalists of a similar age and “there were tensions.” But, Roger says, they soon learned and demonstrated that they knew there was no time for “great art.” They were expected to write six to eight stories a day and Michael King did his share with the rest of them. Both Roger and Evans tell of a sink- or- swim culture and a hard but exciting training ground. King was corrected along with the rest of them if he got his story structure wrong or if his work needed a re-write – but it was his interviewing style which stuck with Roger:

He was a very gentle man with a very quiet nature who could tease information out of people. Listening to his phone interviews he was gentle and persuasive.¹⁵³

Margaret Evans said from day one she recognized King as “the writer among us.” The younger journalists tried to copy his style. She described him as a quiet, comfortable bear of a man who was easy to get to know. As a writer he was just “a natural.”¹⁵⁴ Venetia Sherson corroborates this. She remembered King’s intensity when he was onto a good story, and his integrity in dealing with subjects and people who were not used to dealing with the press, particularly his Maori contacts. But she said most of all she remembered his wonderful style of writing; very simple but effective prose. “It was something we all tried to emulate.”¹⁵⁵ No one has taken issue with King’s ability to write. From his secondary school days when Sprio Zavos recognized his potential, through the time spent at the *Waikato Times* then later when he became an author there is no record of any criticism of his writing in terms of delivery of excellent Standard Written English.

But there is little obvious evidence of King’s day-to-day journalism at the *Waikato Times*. In those days few by-lines were awarded, though King won his fair-share for a variety of page one stories. Leaders or editorials were anonymous. But he did try and reform a news story structure which is taught in newsrooms around the world. Dr Judy McGregor described it at King’s memorial service at Te Papa in Wellington a month after his death:

¹⁵³ Warwick Roger, telephone interview, January 2005

¹⁵⁴ Margaret Evans, telephone interview, January 2005

¹⁵⁵ Venetia Sherson, email communication, January 20 2005

Most stories in newspapers are built like an inverted pyramid, with the introduction being the apex and the story developing outwards underneath this. In the days of hot metal type when the production staff were waiting for the reporter's work to complete a page it would be taken as it was written, normally from the top, or introduction, as he wrote and the words would be set in type to save time.

King did not do this, Dr McGregor explained:

Contrary to instruction he would not write the introductory paragraph first and build the house of his story from the roof spire downwards. He believed the good journalism came from a solid foundation of building blocks and that stories should be written upwards. Naturally, this threw the whole news pattern into chaos. Daily the newsroom would watch the news editor snatching at folios of copy shouting at Michael for the intro paragraph as printers loitered and deadlines loomed. Michael in his ubiquitous duffel coat, hunched over his Imperial 66 typewriter like a genial bear would ignore the frenzy and pounded away until the roof of his story, the intro par, was in place. Only then would the vital folio of copy be handed over. Inevitably as a result, his journalism had a richness and social context that won him respect from peers and readers. Despite his redefinition of the notion of pace Michael's consummate professionalism meant he never missed a deadline.

King would have won the approval of Jack Fuller for his stance against the inverted pyramid approach to story writing and his determination to build a richness into his work rather than adhering to the news rules of the time.

Two sub editors at the *Waikato Times* when King was there also recall King's struggle. Chief sub editor Gordon Chesterman handling much of Michael King's work says initially he had to work hard to break away from the essay style of writing he had been used to, to the "Janet and John" style favoured by newspapers in the early 1970s. Simple reportage was all that was called for in those days. Feature writing was not a large part of a newspaper's content and a feature writing style had not yet evolved. Chesterman says King had a lot of learn, and given any scope would change a news item into a feature.¹⁵⁶ Another sub editor at the *Waikato Times*, Winston Hooper goes further, saying Michael King was not a natural

newspaper writer. He recalls King having to work very hard at the art of news writing, staying late at the Times office after everyone else had left rewriting a piece over and over again until he got it right. But he sought out help and criticism from the sub editors ever keen to learn where he had gone wrong. He was very good at essays but had great difficulty with punchy introductions to stories as is the conventional news style. He liked to ease people into a piece of work then “hit them with the message” according to Hooper.¹⁵⁷

King’s writing style may have given him problems in the newsroom, but was ideal for the discursive form favoured in the Maori world. Both men found King entirely accurate and could not recall any complaints from the public about his work. Hooper said local body politicians were particularly demanding at the time but he cannot recall King’s work being called into question. Initially, King was a wordy writer. Hooper remembers a filler story calling for two paragraphs running to 9 or 10 when Michael King wrote it. He was bemused when it was cut from the bottom back to two paragraphs, but took it with good grace and learned to write more succinctly. King did not treat any stories lightly, from a local garden show to a vegetable market report he took great care to ensure every story was accurate and well crafted.

The editor of the *Waikato Times*, Bruce Martin, is more critical of King’s newspaper work. While in no doubt that his time as a journalist set King up as a writer Martin said he was “pretty rough” and needed guidance when he went to the Times, though he did develop a good news sense.¹⁵⁸ King did not rise in seniority to fill roles such as news editor and took his turn, along with the other journalists as leader writer when required. Martin also puts paid to any myths that King invented the Maori round. It was in place well before King arrived he said. While this could indicate tensions between King and Martin over King’s ability in the newsroom it is fair to presume that Martin as an astute editor could sense King’s frustrations at the confines and constraints of daily journalism. Martin was also keen to preserve the *Waikato Times*’ reputation as a responsible newspaper had valued its Maori news as much as that from its mainstream community before King arrived to work there.

¹⁵⁶ Gordon Chesterman, telephone interview, 08.07.05

¹⁵⁷ Winston Hooper, telephone interview, 08.07.05

¹⁵⁸ Bruce Martin, telephone interview, 20.07.05

Kirby Wright, a photographer with the *Waikato Times* for more than 20 years requested to go with King on most of the Maori assignments. He believes King was a natural communicator. He worked with his interview subjects by holding a conversation with them, rather than question and answer. King's preference was for people stories, he made people comfortable and they started talking says Wright, he cannot remember King ever using a tape recorder, he took notes but not obviously. Few of King's other colleagues can recall hearing him doing interviews. But his quiet demeanor and gentle style produced quotations appropriate to the story according to Hooper. Both he and Chesterman confirmed that King did master daily news writing after a while, but he was most happy when he was able to move into the Maori round and spend time at tangi and on marae. Warwick Roger recalls that King would do his share of general news stories in the mornings, then disappear in the afternoons to come back with his Maori stories.¹⁵⁹

King would absent himself from the newsroom for long periods, only to return full of bustling enthusiasm, late in the day, from wherever he had been, with story after story – short feature pieces – from the world of Waikato Maori, a world about which we Pakeha knew little in those day.¹⁶⁰

However, like many journalists King admitted that when he left daily journalism the thing he missed most was:

The adrenalin flow which accompanies and support reportage of immediate events: the pursuit of a story and witnesses, the surmounting of unforeseen obstacles, the joy of the unexpected breakthrough, the degree of concentration required for simultaneous storytelling and analysis, the inexorable approach of deadlines.¹⁶¹

King tried to retain some of this element of writing in his life as an “antidote to the passivity and isolation of more reflective writing.”¹⁶² He also took an appreciation of deadlines and a pragmatic view on delivering up a regular quota of words to earn a living.

¹⁵⁹ Warwick Roger, telephone interview, January 2005

¹⁶⁰ Roger, W. (1996) ‘Michael King and the Compassionate Truth’, *North and South*, June, p.68

¹⁶¹ Ibid, pp.155

¹⁶² Ibid, pp.155

When Charmain Smith of the *Otago Daily Times* interviewed King following the publication of *Hidden Places*, he told her he was surprised so few people moved between the different writing occupations:

People tend to get pigeon-holed but it seems to me that if words are your business you should be able to write for tabloids, magazines and broadcasting as well as books and academic journals. Communication is the key thing.¹⁶³

In the same interview he touched on one of the reasons he gave up daily journalism – he found the “perishability” unsatisfying. The old adage of today’s news being tomorrow’s fish and chip paper sent him looking for a more enduring medium.

When King died in 2004 many obituaries and tributes were published, some touched on his years in journalism. The Auckland City Library published a piece on its website which talked about his combination of academic studies, and places and themes in New Zealand’s history “with a journalist’s ease of communication with everyday readers.”¹⁶⁴ This is the point already made by Professor Ritchie when he said King’s time as a journalist has been undervalued as a formative stage in his writing career, and with the benefit of hindsight his journalistic colleagues such as Venetia Sherson and Margaret Evans recognized it also. Former Massey University journalism Professor Judy McGregor, who worked with King at the *Waikato Times* told *The Evening Standard* that his early journalism provided a foundation for his later writing:

Though Michael King spent less time than many journalists feeding that voracious beast that is the daily presses he continued to write book reviews, columns, comment pieces and features for New Zealand and international publications.¹⁶⁵

In another presentation at Michael King’s memorial service, Jock Phillips, the chief historian, referring to the controversy over King’s writing of Maori history, said King had to decide where to turn next. One option was to return to journalism and Phillips pointed out that King had always retained the journalist’s instincts:

¹⁶³ Smith, C. (28.10.1992), Communication is the Key, *Otago Daily Times*, p.23

¹⁶⁴ Auckland City Libraries, ‘A Farewell To Michael King’ URL: <http://www.aucklandcitylibraries.com/general> (accessed 23.06.2004)

¹⁶⁵ Obituary (2004) ‘Literary Lion Lost Say Massey Academics’, *Manawatu Evening Standard*, March 31, p.1

By this I mean two things. First, like any journalist he did not begin in the archives. His work usually began, and came to depend upon, human contact.... Secondly as a journalist he always related his history to people's lives. He gave it wider social and political relevance which time has intensified.¹⁶⁶

This is a parallel to Darton's 'incident analysis' in which historians are starting to focus on people rather than events in the retelling of history.

His time at the *Waikato Times* learning the craft of writing for general consumption established for Michael King a reputation for having the common touch. While his peers recognized that he was destined for more, King maximized his opportunities in daily journalism to learn as much as he could. As an academic he was dissatisfied and frustrated with the simple yet rigid rules which regulate life in a newspaper but he took the opportunity to learn how to interview, how to assimilate into another culture, how to meet deadlines and how to write to satisfy a daily audience of average New Zealand readers. He took the pulse of the country, read it accurately, and then moved on.

Michael King – tutor

When he left the *Waikato Times* King took a job tutoring at Wellington Polytechnic. He worked alongside his long-time mentor and friend Christine Cole Catley. She recalls that his students loved him. He made journalism "real" for them she said and he taught them to look beyond the words into the story behind them. His marae trips were an added bonus for the programme and King was in his element teaching the students about a culture few of them had experienced close at hand.¹⁶⁷ But she said King told her that he had learned much about writing during his time as a tutor through a self-imposed analysis of his own work as he taught it to others. One of his ex-students, Teresa O'Connor, said in a piece following his death that she remembered him as a "gifted teacher with a wry sense of humour."¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁶ Phillip, J. (2004) *New Zealand Books*, Vol 14, pp.1 & 3

¹⁶⁷ Christine Cole Catley, interview, 8.05.05

¹⁶⁸ 'Obituary: King's Gift of Enduring Value' (2004) *Nelson Mail*, April 6, p.9

She talked about what he passed on to her as a teacher and as a journalist, but most of all of his taking the students to a marae and showing them another culture. But his doctorate supervisor Professor James Ritchie said it was fair to question how, by modern management criteria, was he qualified to teach journalism?

The answer is that he was a person passionately convinced there was a role for people who showed perspectives. To do it he had to be a good communicator, he was.¹⁶⁹

King makes brief mention of his time at the polytechnic. He called it a “stimulating environment” in which to work and says he and fellow tutors did their best to bring in social critics and public figures for the students to interview, and did their best to simulate the conditions and pressures of a newsroom.¹⁷⁰ When he left the polytechnic he continued teaching writing on the Victoria University extension classes, his topic this time was creative writing. A number of New Zealand’s emerging creative writers attended these classes, one of the best known is Bub Bridger. Of King’s writing talent she says:

It was always there. Michael had a gift, there was nothing he did not know about writing, instinctively. I learned everything I know from Michael King. He would say to us ‘never mind the adjectives and the adverbs – write simply.’ He was a incredible teacher, those who caught on became writers, those who did not listen failed. He changed my entire life, he gave me courage.¹⁷¹

The first short story exercise Michael King set Bub Bridger’s class was to write about something they knew. She wrote about going home from school one day as a child and seeing a big black stallion. Michael King sent it to *The Listener*, it was published, and they accepted her work for many years after that. There was another element to King’s teaching: A deep sense of engagement with his students. Bub Bridger said he built an environment where the students could look at each other’s work and discuss it with a sense of trust and respect. She remained friends with King until his death.

¹⁶⁹ Prof James Ritchie, telephone interview, 27.07.05

¹⁷⁰ King, M. (1999) *Being Pakeha Now*, Auckland: Penguin, p.101

¹⁷¹ B. Bridger, telephone interview, 2.06.05

George Bernard Shaw said somewhat harshly that: “He who can does. He who cannot teaches.”¹⁷² King did both and tried unlock the writer in others while he continued to seek his own niche. Bub Bridger’s comment about engagement is typical of King whose whole life could, in a sense, be described as an attempt to engage people, races, even a nation.

Michael King – reviewer

Given the dual talents of writer and historian the *NZ Listener* frequently used King to review books relating to New Zealand history. This placed him in a position of having to be thoroughly objective about works written by his peers, his contemporaries. He devoted a chapter to “reviews” in *Hidden Places*, where he weighed up the advantages and the disadvantages of reviewing books. He said when he assessed books he tried to keep both the writer and the readers clearly in sight:

For the benefit of the reviewed I ask myself if I am being fair, if I am reviewing the book they actually wrote, and whether the work is good of its kind. On behalf of the readers, I ask does the book do what it set out to do: if so why, if not why not and – the bottom line – is it worth buying?.....while I always regret offending fellow writers, I am answerable ultimately to readers, who expect an honest assessment of the works under consideration.¹⁷³

Two examples of King at work in *The Listener* demonstrate his ability to keep an eye on the historical integrity of a piece, the other on the turn of phrase. In July 2003 King reviewed Anne Salmond’s *The Trial of the Cannibal Dog*. He pointed out “leaps of judgment a historian was unlikely to make” and quoted one of his own mentors, Peter Munz’s attack on her methods.¹⁷⁴ He equalized these with Anne Salmond’s responses and skillfully incorporated a history lesson of his own in places. On balance he was complimentary. James McNeish fared less well. King reviewed his book, *Dance of the Peacocks*, a study of a number of New Zealand Rhodes scholars. King pointed out there were fundamental errors about New Zealand in the 1930s and 40s and said these may have been due to the fact that the

¹⁷² Cohen J.M. and M.J. (1991) *A New Penguin Dictionary of Quotations*, London: Penguin, p.388

¹⁷³ King, M. (1992) *Hidden Places*, Auckland: Sceptre, p.203

¹⁷⁴ King, M. (2003) ‘Endeavour’, *NZ Listener*, URL: <http://listener.co.nz> (accessed 09.09.04)

book did not have a New Zealand editor. The review continued to chastise McNeish for among other things “pummeling and pulling the thesis to suit his needs,”¹⁷⁵ but King ended on a positive note endorsing it to readers as a worthwhile read.

Just after King’s death Steve Braunias, the book editor of the *NZ Listener* wrote about their professional relationship. Braunias said King was the magazine’s most valued reviewer, and New Zealand’s finest man of letters.¹⁷⁶ He talked about some of the reviews King had done for him in the previous two years, touched on the chiding of Anne Salmond over *Trial of the Cannibal Dog*, and described King’s criticism of McNeish’s shortcomings in *Dance of the Peacocks* as a “sound thrashing.” Braunias described King as a sympathetic reviewer, who took the discipline seriously and “loved strong vivid writing”.

King had an advantage as a reviewer in that he had a feel for what the public wanted. As a daily journalist and later as a writer and commentator he developed a sense of what an audience expected. This came partly out of instinct and partly out of a honed sense. He also took to his reviewing balance and fairness which grows out of practising journalism and as Professor James Ritchie has expressed, he always applied his own strong moral values.

Michael King – writer

Michael King has well documented his own love of writing and his early exposure to writers. In *Hidden Places*¹⁷⁷ he devoted a chapter to Writers and Writing, and described his introduction to New Zealand writers through his father’s work in the advertising industry, and the empathy he felt with them. At St Patrick’s College Silverstream King’s history teacher Spiro Zavos went on to become a writer/reviewer and now expatriate editorial writer and rugby columnist for the *Sydney Morning Herald*. In an interview with Warwick Roger for *North and South* magazine in 1996 Zavos described King as “an assiduous and sensitive boy, very teachable.”¹⁷⁸ Zavos confirms that he tried to teach King to write in the style of

¹⁷⁵ King, M. (2003) Men Alone, *NZ Listener*, October, pp.62-63

¹⁷⁶ King, M. (2003) ‘Endeavour’, *NZ Listener*, URL: <http://listener.co.nz> (accessed 09.09.04)

¹⁷⁷ King, M. (1992) *Hidden Places*, Sceptre: Auckland, p.112

¹⁷⁸ Roger, W. (1996) ‘Michael King and the Compassionate Truth’, *North and South*, May, p.68

Britain's AJP Taylor. "Allan Taylor was a narrative historian, rather than a cadre in the Namiuer School with its emphasis on analysis and detail rather than narrative."

He believes that King became New Zealand's AJP Taylor describing him as, "the master of the documents and the secondary sources with a journalistic talent for the illuminating detail and the critical moment in NZ history for example."¹⁷⁹

Zavos himself was educated in the 1950s at secondary school then university where the "plain style" of writing of Professor Ian Gordon prevailed:

Gordon created the English syllabus for school certificate and took the stage one class for English at Victoria University, he used a book of reading he had devised of the great writers in the plain style, from Beowulf through to the New Zealand John Mulgan to make his central thesis that the golden thread in English literature had been the plain style based on the Anglo Saxon basis.....This plain style affected my writing style and sensibilities. I tried to pass it on to my students at St Patrick's College, Silverstream.¹⁸⁰

Michael King wrote 34 books. They varied from small concise readers for school pupils on topics such as Maoritangi, or sexuality, through to biographies and even a coffee table book collaborating with well-known New Zealand photographer Robin Morrison.

King associated with recognized New Zealand writers from an early age and says he always saw earning a living from writing, either books or journalism as an option for his own career.¹⁸¹ But writing that many books in a country as small as New Zealand drew criticism from a number of quarters. King was accused of jumping on the bandwagon of middle class liberalism for *Being Pakeha*, and the update, *Being Pakeha Now*, was seen by some as a pot boiler. He was criticized most strongly by some Maori for writing about their culture and history, and there was a view he wrote some books simply because he needed the money.

¹⁷⁹ Spiro Z. Zavos, email interview, 22.4.05

¹⁸⁰ Roger, W. (1996) 'Michael King and the Compassionate Truth', *North and South*, May, p.68

¹⁸¹ King, M. (1992) *Hidden Places: A Memoir in Journalism*, Auckland: Sceptre, p.112

But Andrew Mason, who edited King's last completed book, *The Penguin History of New Zealand*, believes the combination of academic and journalist was the key to King's enormous success:

He was scholarly enough to have an eye for detail, he did his research first then the journalist took over and his eye for the subject and his feel for language completed the work. He did his homework then had the confidence, the security in his material to write with ease. *The Penguin History* was like that it had an ease that he was on top of his material so it was natural, flowing.¹⁸²

The biographies of Janet Frame and Frank Sargeson were edited by Michael Gifkins who believes the naturally good writing, which King produced, was bred from firstly being a natural reader, and secondly having something to write about – to have both was a “marriage made in heaven.”¹⁸³ The books required very little editing he said. King could do what Gifkins described as “build up a big head of a steam” over a topic, research it thoroughly and then write it well.

There can be little to debate over King's skills as a writer. The sound grounding from teachers such as Spiro Zavos, to the rustic lessons of daily journalism, through to the rigours of earning a living writing books in New Zealand ensured Michael King learned his craft. But it should be noted he never really moved away from the basic formula for success which he learned at the Waikato Times – to write about people.

Writing about Maori

There are a number of stories surrounding how Michael King got onto the Maori round at the *Waikato Times*. Some of his colleagues claim he invented it himself, but in *Being Pakeha Now* he says he was allocated the round within weeks of joining the newspaper fulltime.¹⁸⁴ King says his interest in Maori history and in tattooing (particularly moko) grew out of this and he spent a large part of his weekends immersed in the culture at tangi and hui. These only confirmed the gaps in his knowledge of things Maori, from the language to the customs

¹⁸² Andrew Mason, telephone interview, 2.06.05

¹⁸³ Michael Gifkins, telephone interview, 06.07.05

¹⁸⁴ King, M. (1999) *Being Pakeha Now*, Auckland: Penguin, p.76

and culture. As he developed the round he began meeting prominent Maori. He describes going to a tangi and meeting Eva Rickard for the first time. That meeting he says was typical of the haphazard manner in which he initially approached the round but he describes how Rickard took him in hand and ensured he got the job done. She was the first of a number of Maori who helped, translated and assisted King in many ways as he developed his coverage of Maori affairs in the Times' circulation area. He was able to add many Maori to his contact book – the lifeline of any journalist – to access those who could supply a quote or other information when needed. He improved his pronunciation, learned his mihi, and earned the respect of many Maori for all of that. He also earned the respect of his colleagues and Warwick Roger describes King's story of his first meeting with Waikato kuia, Ngakahikatea, aged between 122 and 120 this way:

Not much journalism is of enduring quality but some is, and this is one of the finest pieces of his writing from those days.¹⁸⁵

That interview sparked King's interest on moko, or Maori tattooing and he wrote his first book, *Moko, Maori Tattooing in the Twentieth Century* three years later. Eminent New Zealand photographer Marti Friedlander took the photographs. It was the first of many books King wrote about Maori people and their customs, and it precipitated a steady move by King through daily reportage and into longer pieces and later books never staying with any particular style but adapting the narrative and the pace to suit.

King left academic life because he wanted, through journalism, to learn how New Zealand worked. How democracy was enacted, how people reacted, and he was drawn into the Maori world where he could exercise his affinity with history and research with his ability to write. His time as a daily reporter had taught him the conventions of journalism: deadlines, what it was like to be edited, how to interview and quote subjects, and story structure. Those conventions also suggest that the writer/journalist must know who his audience is.

Waikato Times editor Bruce Martin says before King went to the Times it ran a "Maori" newspaper insert to which King contributed when he joined the staff. Professor Ritchie who was working at Waikato University at the time says he and King helped develop the newspaper. Whatever the chronology, the *Waikato Times* was in touch with its influential Tainui readership even before King went to work there. The analysis of King's general news

pieces in this thesis demonstrates that he learned how to write a straight news story. He understood balance, how to write an intro, how to write in the third person and how to introduce facts as needed. He even enjoyed the adrenaline-rush of the daily deadline, but he pursued what Roger called the “short feature pieces.”¹⁸⁶ The piece about Ngakahikatea, which Roger talked about, is an example. It was written in the first person. There was a description of the setting and of the woman, and there was a strong sense of metaphor even then: “...life rattled inside her like seeds in a dried pod.”¹⁸⁷ There is a sense that as time passed at the *Waikato Times* King started to turn away from the western world focused news values of Galtung and Ruge to embrace (possibly sub consciously) David Robie’s four-world news values.

By the mid-1980s what King called “The Climate of Change”¹⁸⁸ was taking place. In the late 1970s and into the 1980s Maori were becoming increasingly annoyed that Pakeha were writing about Maori history. Mannion’s *Metro* article outlined what he called a “battle” which ensued. Activist Atareta Poananga was, he wrote, not impressed by King’s effort to educate Pakeha about Maori culture, “for her educating Pakeha about Maori is no longer the issue; educating them about their own racism is.”¹⁸⁹ Neither, according to Mannion, did King gain any credit for his ethnographic approach to his research. Poananga saw it as intruding on Maori culture, and she did not see any merit in Pakeha who learn to speak Maori. It was she who coined the term “academic raider” for King.

While he tempers his words and speaks more kindly, the highly regarded Maori academic Professor Ranginui Walker was quoted in the Mannion article saying he initially encouraged King in his work, but would now (1984) be less likely to do so and was “more open to persuasion that books such as *Te Puea* and *Whina* are no longer the sort of a books a Pakeha should be writing.”¹⁹⁰ Dr Walker now denies that he gave this impression to Mannion. He says King’s biography of *Te Puea* was excellent, based on very sensitive material given to him by Tainui because they trusted him. Walker says King served a long apprenticeship in order to be able to write books such as *Te Puea* and *Whina* Cooper’s biographies and had they not been written “we would have been the poorer for it.” He says at the time there were

¹⁸⁵ Roger, W. (1996) ‘Michael King and the Compassionate Truth’, *North and South*, p.67

¹⁸⁶ Ibid, p.67

¹⁸⁷ King, M. (1999) *Being Pakeha Now*, Auckland: Penguin, p.81

¹⁸⁸ Ibid, p.181

¹⁸⁹ Mannion, R. (1984) ‘Michael King: A Pakeha Writer Meets the Maori Renaissance’ *Metro*, October, p.105

too few Maori scholars who could do it (“there are not enough now”).¹⁹¹ But outspoken Maori commentator Syd Jackson was scathing of Maori elders who had talked to Pakeha (King) about their ancestors. Professor Sid (Hirini) Mead went further. As King recalled in *Being Pakeha Now*, Mead railed in *The Listener*:

The Pakeha are reaching into Maori culture and pulling out features with which they can identify, taking hold of quite generous portions, which they can then try and fit into a Pakeha cultural world.¹⁹²

Professor Mead described *Tihei Mauri Ora*, a small book edited by King about tikanga, as a:

...new sort of do-goodingIts editor has to salve his conscience by making it possible for Maori writers to say what they like on anything of their choice through the missionary-like zeal of Michael King.¹⁹³

In a more recent lecture entitled ‘Are We All New Zealanders Now? A Maori Response to the Pakeha Quest for Indigeneity,’ Dr Ani Mikaere argued against views expressed by Don Brash, Trevor Mallard and Michael King. King’s views which disturbed her were largely represented in *Being Pakeha*. She argued strongly for Maori history and identity to be maintained but overlooked the work King did in that area. Dr Walker suggests that the prejudice against King came out of the mistaken view that writers earned a lot of money from their books and King was making money writing about Maori. He puts this down to a lack of understanding and says the real return to a writer is having people admire his work.

Jonathon Milne, in *The Dominion*, quoted King as saying his book, *Being Pakeha* was very defensive..... “It’s the difference between writing something when your nerves are still quivering, and then reflecting in tranquility further down the track.”¹⁹⁴ Two things here, one that King was admitting he was deeply shaken by the attacks by Maori on his work of Maori, and secondly an admission of the emotion which was influencing his writing at that time. Milne also recounted the attack by Atareta Poananga after King published his biography of

¹⁹⁰ Ibid p.104

¹⁹¹ Dr Ranginui Walker, telephone interview, 20.09.05

¹⁹² King, M. (1999), *Being Pakeha Now*, Auckland: Penguin, p.182

¹⁹³ Ibid. p.182

¹⁹⁴ Milne, J. (1999) ‘The Rise and Rights of the White Natives’, *The Dominion*, URL: <http://oi.knowledge-basket.co.nz/poly/cma/cma.pl?id> (accessed 28.12.04)

Dame Whina Cooper calling him “an academic raider”, and Mana Motuhake president Albie Tahana describing him as “a bloody Pakeha who’s too arrogant to know he’s overstepped the mark.”

All these caused King to pull back from writing about Maori. His audience had always been Pakeha whom he hoped to enlighten and educate, and he was largely succeeding, but for some Maori even aiming at that audience was unacceptable. They called for Maori culture and history to be written by Maori, and for Pakeha to look at rewriting their own history in a way that would more accurately reflect the colonization of New Zealand and its effects on the tangata whenua.

In his biography released in 2005 veteran Maori broadcaster Henare te Ua devoted a chapter to King and was greatly saddened by the lack of Maori involvement in the King’s funeral in Auckland. Te Ua bemoaned this and King’s early passing saying he believed that if New Zealand ever needed King’s communication skills it was now.

St Mathew tells us a prophet is not without honour, save in his own country.¹⁹⁵ The same can be said for King. His writing was lauded and his bravery and his communication skills praised, but his choice of topics, the feathers he ruffled and the angles he pursued made him unpopular in some quarters. His technical skill as a writer was never brought into question, his choice of topics attracted some vilification, but the same hazards have been encountered by many journalists in pursuit of truth and transparency. Which begs the question, when King was pursuing the Maori topics was he wearing the mantle of journalist, or historian. Both, it has already been shown pursue truth, fact and events, often through the people who figured in those events. This explains why King was so shocked and hurt by the criticism, he was doing a job he knew needed to be done and he felt he had done it carefully and well.

¹⁹⁵ Cohen J.M. and M.J. (1991) *Representative Men, A New Penguin Dictionary of Quotations*, London: Penguin, p.50

Chapter 5 – Findings

Was King a good writer?

The question might be superfluous given that King was one of New Zealand's leading writers at the time of his death. King was a good writer, that has to be a given in that he made a living from writing alone for more than 30 years, was lauded and honoured for his literary works and was not only frequently published but highly read. The question then is how good was he, and why? How much of his success as a writer was due to his mechanical ability to string words together and how much was due to the contention which opened the review of the literature:

“Talent alone cannot make a writer. There must be a man behind the book.”¹⁹⁶

The King family history which has been recounted many times now shows that he was immersed in words from a very early age. He was read to, he wanted to write and he absorbed books. He read the classics in literature – Dickens, Thackeray, Hemingway – and he even admits he reproduced some of their techniques for his own writing during his school days. He was influenced by then history teacher, now journalist, Spiro Zavos who is also on record as saying he encouraged King, enjoyed teaching him, and taught him to write his history essays in a journalistic style. There are no other clues as to whether King was a good young writer. He gained the University Entrance examination and went on to university to study English and history. He learned to write well enough for the academy and gained an undergraduate degree, then he decided to write for the masses and became a professional journalist. The biographical pieces about his life up until this time convey a feeling of casual inevitability that he would write in order to make his living. There is no mention of any other career or bent which would deviate him from writing in one form or another. He had mixed with writers even as a boy and saw writing as a legitimate profession, albeit he recognized it was not a well paid one. But until he had a family to support King's writing had been done mainly for scholastic reasons. When he began work at the *Waikato Times* he was writing for

¹⁹⁶ Cohen J.M. and M.J. (1991) *Representative Men, A New Penguin Dictionary of Quotations*, London: Penguin, p.159

a new audience. His work was being scrutinized both by fellow staff members and readers and it was no longer good enough to write in the prescribed essay form on a named topic. King took to the *Waikato Times* an enthusiasm for words and a knowledge of history. He was well read, was comfortable in the company of other writers, and was keen to learn about the genre of journalism although he would not take readily to common journalistic practices such as story structure.

As interviews with colleagues have shown they recognized King as “the writer among us” from day one. They said he was a natural writer and the other reporters would try and emulate his style, described as “simple but effective.” It is difficult to find much of King’s work as a daily journalist at the *Waikato Times* because few stories carried bylines in the 1970s. Some features were the exception. On September 3, 1969 King wrote a front page lead story about the possibility of a canal being built to link the Manakau Harbour with the Waikato River.¹⁹⁷ It began with a 23-word introduction. The second paragraph supported the first in normal pyramid style. There is no jargon, and it is clearly written. It appears to be accurate, all proper names are spelt correctly, and it is written in the active voice to a general audience. However both sentence and paragraph length are consistently long throughout the story, which cuts across the guidelines for good writing analysed in the review of literature. This changed in King’s later writing.

King credits his early well-intentioned “plagiarism” of Hemingway’s work for school essays for the ability later in his journalistic career to be able to take an international issue and localize it. In a feature cover story on the front of the Saturday Weekend Comment and Opinion section of the *Waikato Times* in October 1969, King tackled a challenge on traditional structures within the Catholic Church.¹⁹⁸ It was thoroughly researched, but some information was not sourced, and four consecutive paragraphs begin with the word “They” – possibly for effect. But it was easy to read, understandable, and the non secular layperson could follow a balanced argument about serious disquiet in the Catholic Church of New Zealand. It did not include any jargon which non-Catholics would not understand, while it was written mainly for a Catholic readership. Direct quotes were used to give the story life, and a number of people were quoted. Sentence and paragraph length varied. In another feature in 1969 King had the opportunity to put his history degree to work.

¹⁹⁷ King, M. (1969) ‘Consortium begins surveys on canal plan’, *Waikato Times*, 3 Sept., p.1

He outlined an archaeological dig in the Waikato and explained how archaeologists work.¹⁹⁹ Measured against the criteria for good writing on the literature review this story may have struggled to engage an audience. It was written in the style of a school text book rather than an informative piece. The introduction was lengthy (27 words) and some sentences were equally lengthy. The subject was complex but was written in an easily understood manner with any jargon explained. It was a good example of King's reluctance to accept the inverted pyramid style of journalistic prose, and rather build a story from the bottom up. But most of the time King accepted and conformed to the journalistic style of writing, though as the subeditors on the *Waikato Times* have pointed out he did wrestle with it and had to work hard at it. Two sub editors of the time say he was not a natural daily newspaper journalist. He struggled with the simplistic style of prose required, he preferred to ease his readers into a story rather than hit them with the message in the introduction and this carried through into an aversion for the inverted pyramid style of story. He also struggled, like young Rudyard Kipling with brevity. There is a sense that he too found the tightness for space on a newspaper as "limiting his canvas." The translation of jargon into plain English is another key element of good writing and Keeble supported this in the review of literature saying it was a reporter's task to translate jargon into term comprehensible to the mass readership. There is a parallel to this in the writing style of academics which is less "plain" than that required of journalists. King is credited widely with being able to take complex subjects, historical events or lives which have been closely guarded against intrusion and turn them into books which are readable and understandable by lay people, yet still have integrity. This is particularly true of his historical themes.

King was not a typical "reporter" in the newspaper environment of that time. He did his best to cover day-to-day news in the style of the day as it was required of all "reporters" but he did not do it well, neither was he a natural at it. But he was a good writer and he was good at building a rapport with people so they would talk to him. He had the patience and humility needed to observe, ask and learn. He was a good researcher and a historian and all these qualities, drawn together, made him a good journalist. His editor and sub editors agree he mastered most of the tenets of journalistic writing in the end but his strengths lay in other areas.

¹⁹⁸ King, M. (1969) 'Catholics Search Souls, *Waikato Times*, Weekend Comment and Opinion, 3 Sept., p17

Warwick Roger pointed out that King found a way to combine his love and knowledge of history with his job as a journalist by pursuing stories about Maori history. King acknowledges this:

Given the way in which my interests in history and writing overlapped it was inevitable that much of my journalism would be of an historical character. Because history, in the sense of the study of the past, is never simply an accumulation of data. It is a consequence of the application of intelligence and analysis to such an accumulation; an attempt to organise events and ideas into meaningful patterns. And this process in utterly in harmony with what I have always conceived to be the function of the writer.²⁰⁰

Other aspects linked to his writing which did draw comment from his colleagues included his conscientiousness whether he was reporting on a flower show or a major news story, the other was his accuracy. Neither the sub editors nor his editor can recall any complaints regarding the accuracy of King's work.

Warwick Roger believes the interviewing skills which King displayed very quickly set him apart at the *Waikato Times*. Several colleagues commented on his unassuming demeanor, his quietness in the newsroom and, although they could hear little due to his soft spoken-ness, his ability to develop rapport and elicit information in an interview situation. Kirby Wright, the photographer who went on many Maori assignments with him believes King was a natural communicator.²⁰¹ Everyone spoken to in relation to King's interviewing style describes him initiating conversations rather than interrogative interviews to get information. His note-taking was unobtrusive and no one can recall him ever using a tape recorder. But the effective use of quotes referred to by his sub editors, plus the accuracy of his work would conclude that he did record quotes and facts correctly. Christine Cole Catley remembers that when he was tutoring at Wellington Polytechnic he learned Teeline shorthand along with the students. He also had a very good memory and would be unobtrusive in his note-taking, sometimes waiting until after the interview to write down quotes.²⁰² The more significant

¹⁹⁹ King, M. (1969) Race To Read Historic Past, *Waikato Times*, Weekend Comment and Opinion, 6 Sept., p.19

²⁰⁰ King M. (1992) *Hidden Places*, Auckland: Sceptre, p.185

²⁰¹ K. Wright, telephone interview, 08/07/05

²⁰² Christine Cole Catley, email communication, 17.09.05

aspect of interviewing in King's work as a journalist was that it brought him directly in contact with people.

Both Robert Knight and William Strunk are strong advocates of "vigorous writing," writing with energy. "Convince your readers you are convinced" said Knight, and as he spent more time talking and engaging with Maori, King became convinced his stories had merit. He was according to his colleague Warwick Roger "full of bustling enthusiasm." It was only shortly after this that King felt he had to leave the *Waikato Times* because he was not displaying the "neutered detachment" required of journalists. He was convinced but some of his colleagues were not.

New Zealand photographer Marti Friedlander took the photographs for King's first book *Moko*, which grew out of a series he did for the *Waikato Times*. She travelled around the kuia whom King had already interviewed and was deeply impressed with the rapport he had built with each of them and their families:

He was always kind, always polite, there was no aggression, in fact they treated him as if he were a member of their extended family.²⁰³

She said he had clearly done a lot of research and he spoke to the Maori families in Te Reo Maori as well as English. "People are most interested in people" said King, and as he fostered his skill of interacting with people, persuading them to be photographed and interviewed he was drawn into writing longer and more complex pieces about them. An example is the interview he did with Ngakahikatea Whirihana who was aged about 117 and was the first of the "moko women." She spoke only Maori and King did the interview through an interpreter. Even so he was able to inject colour into his story through quotes:

"I sold them corn for their horses", she said. Then she cackled – "at threepence a bundle."²⁰⁴

King also asked her what her favourite television programme was – her response, the teenage pop music show C'mon.

²⁰³ Marti Friedlander, telephone interview, 04.08.05

²⁰⁴ King, M. (1969) I Sold Them Corn for Their Horses, *Waikato Times*, July 25, features section p.1

When King moved into newspapers his audience changed. He was writing on a daily basis for rank and file New Zealanders who neither wanted nor cared about academic prose but did want their news to be delivered clearly, representing a balanced view and on topics which interested them, not unlike Kovach and Rosenstiel's news-gathers who first inhabited Africa and the Pacific. Professor Ritchie had also noted in the interview he gave for this thesis that when King went to the *Waikato Times* he had to perform to the ethical standards which he had set himself and which were borne out of his Catholic upbringing.

Although Bruce Martin, King's editor, says the *Waikato Times* was already covering Maori issues, there is little doubt King moved that coverage up several gears and there is no evidence to show that readers did not enjoy what he wrote. His colleagues, and King himself, felt he was opening up a world which had been largely over-looked until then by European New Zealand. If King's audience had seemed unclear at that time, 20 years later when he was challenged, as a Pakeha, over his writing about Maori he was very clear he had been writing for all New Zealanders but had assumed his work would largely educate non-Maori about Maori to the good.

King was writing for New Zealanders. This is the basis of his two books, *Being Pakeha* and *Being Pakeha Now*. While he struggled philosophically with his place in the country he wrote for his countrymen at large and it could be argued that his success as a journalist on the Maori round, then as a documentary maker, and finally author vindicated him in this. In the last public interview King did prior to his death, which aired on March 25 on 95bFM he was asked if it was correct that he wrote books for a general audience rather than academics because he felt people needed to hear the stories and he needed to get the best access possible. He replied that he still thought there was a scholarly function involved because his books, he hoped, were written in a scholarly way:

The point I've always made is I'm writing for a general audience, rather than just for an audience of academics or fellow historians.²⁰⁵

²⁰⁵ Pound, S. (2004) 'Michael King's last interview' (radio transcript) *scoop*
URL: www.scoop.co.nz/mason/stories/HL0404/S00011.htm (accessed 27.07.04)

While he was a journalist his role was clear. He was required to write stories to entertain the readers of the newspaper which employed him. He is now seen as a role model for all New Zealand journalists who should equip themselves to be able to report on and about Maori issues, and comport themselves appropriately when required to recognize tikanga. Later his view of his role changed. He put aside Galtung and Ruge's first world news values and adhered more closely to Robie's fourth world values. He crusaded for greater knowledge about Maori, their customs, their language and their spirit. If, as Tucker claims, reporting on Maori affairs is more a state of mind than anything else, then King adopted that state of mind while he was a journalist.

But King felt the stories he was uncovering were worth more than being consigned to "fish and chip papers." He wanted a wider, more enduring audience. If in the early 1970s Maori was a minority race whose identity had been subjugated, and whose language was under threat, King's efforts in print and on television went some way to provide for them, as well as non-Maori, a shared experience at a time of identity crisis which as Downie and Kaiser suggest is a role of the media. It was not until he had moved on from journalism into authorship that a section of King's audience turned on him and he had to find other topics, other audiences to write to. I believe that King took on, perhaps unwittingly, a "missionary" role in his writing about Maori. For a time he had the field to himself. Earlier historians such as Sinclair had approached New Zealand history from the European point of view, but King had become so immersed in the Maori world he was speaking for it, and this proved the wake-up call from some Maori to move King on and get involved themselves.

We will never know whether King's stories about Maori when he was a journalist were born out of a true fascination with the race; a very astute news sense in judging the country was ready to learn more about its indigenous population; or an eye for a corner of the news market as yet untapped. I believe it was a combination of all three – melded into a pragmatic idealism which journalism often produces.

If Masterton's six major news criteria were allied to King's penchant for Maori news he could not go wrong in 1970s New Zealand. Consequence, proximity, conflict, human interest, novelty and prominence could all be applied to stories which came out of the Maori round at that time, but as Masterton also pointed out, sub editors and editors also had to be prepared to use these kinds of stories to see the theme perpetuated. Hypothetically had King

come to journalism through the normal channels – through a journalism school, or as a cadet directly from school – he may not have had the same attachment to Maori. But his background in history, his training in research and his natural curiosity set him up well at a time when there were few Maori journalists and those who were on the scene, such as Harry Dansey, helped and supported him. When covering Maori stories King would have been expected to tackle the issues in an “objective” manner. Nothing suggests that he was not objective, or at least balanced initially at least, within the world of Maori. As Tucker has pointed out when Pakeha journalists are sent to cover Maori issues they tend to “analyse, summarise, categorise, and report on issues based on what they know. That is their ‘objectivity,’ their essentially non-Maori, non minority, non marginalized world view.”²⁰⁶ King’s own biographical writing and research would suggest that King’s appetite for a wider view was whetted by his study of history and maybe even his upbringing which exposed him to a variety of writers who work on a broader canvas. Later in his career some critics suggested that King’s involvement with Maori and his prolific writing about them was opportunist, but in his journalistic days there is no suggestion from colleagues that he was cynical enough to pursue it for that reason. As Wynstan Curnow said, bad writing was bad writing and no amount of indigenous advertisement could give it better than sentimental value. It was be fair to conclude that King was not writing about Maori to capitalize on indigenous advertisement and it was not this which made his writing any better than it already was. It is more likely that King was doing what Robie has concluded is a journalist’s job “to recount as accurately as possible the shared realities of his or her society or culture.”²⁰⁷

Late in his time at the *Waikato Times* King was astute enough to see that his continued backing of Maori efforts was bringing his objectivity into question. He realized that he had crossed the line from crusader into zealot over the Maori studies centre at Waikato University. Michael Meadows recognized that the closer journalists got to the action the less they saw. King also acknowledges that as he became more immersed in the cause of Maori the more influenced by the cause he became. Martin Bell legitimized this with his journalism of attachment but King could see he could no longer pursue his role for Maori at the *Waikato Times*. He said he was made to feel he had pushed the issue of the Maori Research Centre too vigorously, “for a journalist who ought to be displaying some sort of

²⁰⁶ Tucker, J. (2001) *Intro: A Guide to New Zealand Journalism*, 2nd edn, Wellington: NZJTO, p.266

neutered detachment.” He had in three years become the Pakeha journalist who proved it was possible to cover Maori issues, become accepted at Maori gatherings and develop stories which had never been told before written in a way which made them acceptable to most New Zealanders. His book written for the New Zealand Journalists Training Organization, *Kawe Korero*, is now being revised for use by journalists all round New Zealand. But King was not Maori and if he went a step too far it is a lesson for anyone who immerses themselves in another culture.

George Orwell held a view that ego played a role in writing and the drive towards good writing. The desire to seem clever and be remembered after death – even to get your own back on grown ups who snubbed you in childhood were strong motives, as quoted in the review of literature. Tucker also pointed out people who were easily polarized by issues, or those who wanted to change the world, or wanted power and influence on an ego trip... “are less likely to make it into journalism.” Rather, successful journalists were trained observers, philosophers and story tellers.”²⁰⁸ King’s newspaper colleagues make special mention of his unassuming nature, sub editors talk of King working late to master the newspaper writing style required, and when he died people were still talking about his unprententious attitude to his life. His ego was hurt when he was attacked by Maori for writing about their prominent figures and their culture.

On a personal level King was part of a close and supportive family. He had received encouragement from an early age and his father, a media man, was used to working to the highest professional standards. This writer has first hand experience of Lewis King’s delight when his son wrote another best seller or won an award. That King was driven to write well to please his family as George Orwell suggested could well be correct but no more so than most.

King’s colleagues talk about him as a humble man. He did not choose writing as a career to get rich, though he did receive a lot of publicity and if he was hoping, as Orwell also suggests, to be well remembered after death, he has certainly done that. The most likely role ego played in King’s writing was that he took particular care to be reviewed and recorded as

²⁰⁷ Robie, D. (ed.) (2001) *The Pacific Journalist*, Suva: University of the South Pacific, p.14

²⁰⁸ Tucker, J. (2001) *Intro: A Guide to New Zealand Journalism*, 2nd edn, Wellington: NZJTO, p.266

a good writer of history who did not make errors or get his facts wrong. This stems from a mix of both disciplines, historian and journalist.

King made a seamless transition from journalist to writer. He could see his career in journalism was limiting and he no longer fitted the mold of a provincial newsroom. But he had moved from simple news stories to small people profiles to longer features, particularly about Maori people, and to opinion pieces. He had also gone a long way towards immersing himself in Maoridom. He was comfortable on marae, he could speak some Maori, he had many friends among the Maori families of the Tainui people and he was credible as a reporter of Maori culture.

When the limiting canvas Rudyard Kipling referred to became too small he moved into television for the one and only time in his life, but he also decided to expand his feature stories on the Maori moko women and turn them into a story. If Maurice Shadbolt set himself the task as a New Zealander to explore, illuminate and transmit a vision of the national sensibility, King was not far behind. He discovered there was news in the Maori world. Not the hard corrosive news which has grown over the past 10 years but an educative kind which revealed a race of people rich in tradition, who revered their elderly, and kept their culture alive by protecting it closely on marae and through ceremony. He embraced what Robie described as the fourth world needs for self determination and nationhood and at a cost to his personal life immersed himself in it as much as he could.

The study by feature editors referred to in the literature review found there were two kinds of writers in journalism. Those who wrote news and those who wrote features. The best writers were the best observers they found and they needed to write with an accuracy which came from close observation. A diluted form of immersion reporting with its narrative techniques which freed the voice of the writer and set high standards of accuracy as Norman Sims described it was ideal for King. Not for him the flamboyance of the New Journalism as practiced by Tom Wolfe, but a softer approach taken by authors whom King read – Mark Twain, John Steinbeck and Hemingway with his mastery of narrative. However King was still able to portray what Wolfe called a person's "status life." He loved the evocation of character and mannerism which were to become the trademark of his biographical pieces.

King discovered narrative when he left daily journalism. He reveled in the broader canvass provided by a script when he wrote the television documentary *Tangata Whenua* though he flinched at the depth in which he delved into people's lives to do it. In his lengthy interview with Warwick Roger he said he did try and write history "with the apparatus of a novelist," looking for the things which work in a narrative sense, to open a window to a subject and to haul the reader through."²⁰⁹ King threw himself headlong into the Maori world when he left the *Waikato Times*. Even when he taught journalism at Wellington Polytechnic he made sure his students had a marae experience. When he decided to make his living from freelance writing he turned away from daily journalism never to return no matter how short money was.

Mark Kramer, as already outlined in the review of the literature, set out a number of rules for literary journalists and the second involves a covenant about the candor and accuracy a journalist must work out with his sources and readers. This translates to credibility, and while there is no evidence that King ever lost his credibility with Pakeha and many Maori some sought to discredit him as a writer of things Maori. Kramer also suggested that the literary journalist wrote in an informal, frank, human voice and the stance was disengaged so the writer could turn and address his audience. This style was fairly new to the New Zealand audience which could have dismissed King as an ego-driven historian seeking popular appeal. Instead his work struck a chord within the country of the time. Possibly because his writing came out of a solid background in history enlivened by the hand of a journalist he was able to write his own rules of engagement with his audience, this could have worked – or failed miserably.

It worked for King and he mastered the skill of taking historical events and presenting them to a 20th century New Zealand in an informative, entertaining and readable manner much in the way of Katherine Mansfield's "little land making its own history." As a self-employed writer using some of the techniques of literary journalism King no longer had to adhere to daily deadlines and could spend weeks at a time among the Maori people talking to them, observing and researching. But tempering this was a strong conviction that more people needed to be learning about Maori. He felt there was no time to waste, with a journalist's respect for an impending deadline, or a story which could be slipping away, he pushed ahead

²⁰⁹ Roger, W. (1996) 'Michael King and the Compassionate Truth', *North and South*, May, p.75

with *Tangata Whenua*, and the Moko women. He knew that by the time someone else was ready to write about them they could have passed away. He learned the importance of relationship building. Friedlander, Roger, Wright, all speak of King's ability to build rapport with people and to observe them without intrusion. The metaphors which run through his Maori works and the descriptive passages economically describe people and surroundings. Christine Cole Catley recalls being persuaded to drive King deep into the Urewera to interview an old Maori woman. They stayed all day and Cole Catley describes the old woman holding onto her wrist with bony fingers beseeching her not to take King away. He talked to people for hours, waited patiently at gatherings for days, observing, and taking notes which he would later weave into a piece of work reflecting the scenes, and people he had mingled with. Historian Jock Phillips has pointed out that as a journalist King always related history to people's lives. This set him apart from academics – he supplied the “who” as well as the “what” and the “where.”

When working on books such as *Te Puea* King would research in libraries for weeks then strike out on the roads to call on people who could supply him with the colour he needed to bring the history alive. He describes his doctoral thesis as an ethno-biography in which he immersed himself in the life and culture of the Princess Te Puea in order to learn from her descendents about her extraordinary life story. When the book was launched in 1977 one thousand people attended the launch party and it coincided with the 25th anniversary of Te Puea's death. Professor James Ritchie believes writing *Te Puea* was the high point of King's incline in his fascination of things Maori. “He did not lose interest but there was no longer the sharpness after that.”²¹⁰ King notes in *Being Pakeha Now* that within two years of the book going to print many of the people who had been crucial to its success had passed away and the information they had been able to supply had passed with them.

The riddle of objectivity rose again after *Te Puea* was launched, he had written that she had “crushed” some people in her path and one family in particular was very upset by this, feeling they had been humiliated by their portrayal in the book:

I mention this reaction, alongside others, to show how different factors prevail between Maori and non Maori biographies. In a non-Maori book it is enough to reveal information about the past if it is document-ably true, and if it sheds crucial

light on the motivation and behaviour of the central character. In a Maori book, this rule of thumb can cause other complications. As Elsie Locke reminded me, the doings of ancestors have a bearing on the lives of their descendants; mana (or its absence) is a hereditary quality that moves up and down the genealogical ladder.²¹¹

King said this kind of problem remained for Maori or Pakeha writers of Maori history, and he was not sure that censoring “the events of the past because of their effect on the living” is an acceptable solution. I believe King struggled with the historian/journalist’s ethic (objectivity) to represent facts as they should be told and not in such a way as to protect, or not embarrass or trample on the mana of generations to follow.

When King stepped back from writing about Maori he developed his skill in the mainstream arena but there were tensions between the objectivity he was obliged to bring in representing an account of a person’s life and the expectations of others. How to handle the sensitive issue of Sargeson being a homosexual is an example of this? King decided to treat it in the same way as he would treat another person’s heterosexuality. He told Warwick Roger:

Sympathetic disinterestedness is the position I try to adopt. I’m not writing on behalf of anyone. I’m not trying to make a hero or villain of the subject. But at the same time by presenting what they did and how they lived, in context, I try to be sympathetic to their experience.²¹²

On the whole the book was well received. The reviewers liked the pace, the narrative and the presentation of the facts in a way which would appeal to the audience the book was likely to draw. It won him a Montana Book Award. But King did not always attract a wide audience. In 1981 he wrote the biography of explorer Andreas Reischek. He had been commissioned to write it, he did not select the topic, and he made very little money from it. “A successful biographer must have the historian’s respect for objective truth” said John McCrystal, in his review of *Tread Softly for You Tread on My Life*, King’s own collection of some of his writings.²¹³ The review was favourable but the book was one of several examples of King

²¹⁰ James Ritchie, telephone interview, 20.07.05

²¹¹ King, M. (1999) *Being Pakeha Now*, Auckland: Penguin, p.149

²¹² Ibid, p.70

²¹³ McCrystal, J. ‘King Writes With His Customary Wit and Wisdom’, *The Evening Post*, URL: <http://io.knowledge-basket.co.nz/poly/cma/cma.pld> (accessed 28.10.04)

being able to gather pieces of his work together, repackage them for re-sale – and get away with it.

His books about Janet Frame, the highly regarded New Zealand author are vital chronicles of the life of one of the country's leading literary figures. Because Frame was so reclusive there was little on the record about her, other than her own accounts, until King wrote her biography and she has since died, diagnosed with cancer not long before King was. His story of her life serves a vital historical purpose in terms of New Zealand literature.

But the more unusual non-Maori works which King wrote and sold well were his reflective books, *Being Pakeha* and *Being Pakeha Now*. More than one person interviewed for this thesis described Michael King as a very complex man. On the face of it he was born and brought up in a comfortable middle class European environment and received a good education. He was a New Zealander by birth with Irish, Scottish and Jewish ancestry and he wrote those books when he turned away from writing about Maori, partially as a response to his critics, partly to claim a place for non Maori, or “white natives” as he called them in New Zealand. It could be argued that he bared his soul in order to help others understand the nature of the ordinary New Zealander. Or that he sought to put a stake in the ground for what he called the second indigenous culture – Pakeha New Zealanders.

That he used the opportunity to claim some of that ground back from the Maori who had tried to discredit him, was not lost on his reviewers. He acknowledged in the foreword of *Being Pakeha Now*, which was reprinted after his death, that it was largely autobiographical and he was conscious of how many times the word “I” appeared. He realized this could have appeared egotistic, but he used himself as a kind of human litmus paper with which to test the mix of New Zealand society through the 1980s and 1990s. If the books did nothing else they established King in the mainstream arena following his major works on Maori topics. They cemented King as a commentator and a person who flagged issues to be debated. Maurice Shadbolt sought to transmit a vision of the national sensibility and so did King, using different devices but to a similar end. Through all this he adjusted his writing style subtly depending on his topic and his reputation as a communicator grew.

His book, *The Death of the Rainbow Warrior*, employed his journalistic skills more than any other. It was promoted as the first book to reveal who bombed the Greenpeace flagship, The

Rainbow Warrior and how, and King is described as one of New Zealand's investigative writers. The book would do credit to any mystery writer. It is rich in fact, interspersed with anecdotal detail and narrative, plus description and subtle metaphor which bring the complicated plot alive. Direct quotes are used in places where it is very hard to believe they were recorded on tape or paper. I would ask whether King made them up, or whether he relied on his sources' memory to recite them accurately years on. That aside King was able to gain the co operation of everyone he needed from the police to the judiciary. In one of the final chapters he describes the debate among the Ngati Hei iwi from Northland who could not consent to the wreck of the Rainbow Warrior being sunk in their waters.

Two books stand out among the non-Maori topics, both historical works, both requiring meticulous research and both commanded a huge audience. The first, about the Moriori, a race apart from the Maori who settled largely on the Chatham Islands and whose culture and existence had been largely subjugated by the Maori.

King was invited to write *Moriori: A People Rediscovered* by the Solomons, one of the main Moriori families on the Chatham Islands. He spent several years researching it meticulously and it won a Wattie Book of the Year award. Once again King was credited with working his way through a labyrinth of fact, fiction, folk lore and fable to bring together a history which was credible historically yet readable. James Ritchie said King was well regarded for his word economy but in *Moriori* Ritchie felt King gave the book and the history the detail it deserved. But, he said, those details was never tedious, "sometime you could think 'gee he's carrying on a bit here' but then the reason would become obvious."²¹⁴ Ritchie is certain the lack of verbosity can be sheeted back to the days when King worked within "press limitations" but once released from those constraints he did not slip into bad habits. Ritchie said King was able to write with brevity not terseness and was comfortable with his own method of self-editing. But once King had completed a piece it was very difficult to get him to cut it back any further. Andrew Mason believes King hit his stride as a writer with *Moriori*, that he "rose to the subject" as never before and in that book the subject, the history and the writing came together most aptly. Dr Walker says the book *Moriori* played a role in the recovery of that culture on the Chatham Islands and the Maori loss was the Moriori gain

²¹⁴James Ritchie, telephone interview, 20.7.05

in terms of King's literary attention. A picture of Michael King and his second wife Maria hangs in the meeting house of the new Moriori marae.

King's last complete book, *The Penguin History of New Zealand*, has been hailed as one of his best. It topped best seller lists, was summer reading for ordinary New Zealanders, and yet few historians could find fault with it from an academic point of view. Andrew Mason, who edited it, said it had a natural flow and an inevitability which progressed logically and coherently from start to finish. Mason could not find a word out of place. He said King always chose his words carefully and he had the journalist's technique of using natural metaphor. Mason is certain that King's choice of language and metaphor stemmed from his journalistic background. But some reviewers were not so happy with the Penguin History. It was compared with Keith Sinclair's much earlier *History of New Zealand* and David Mitchell, in the *Nelson Mail* preferred Sir Keith's more precise and considered use of language. Mitchell said some quotes gathered by King were inadequately attributed, and some sentences badly phrased. He also pointed out several errors of fact.²¹⁵ But on balance the book was well received, well read and will also be remembered as King's last.

It was inevitable that when King's *The Penguin History of New Zealand* was published in 2003 it would be compared to *A History of New Zealand*, written by Sinclair and first published in 1959. Both men were historians, both are now dead but while Sinclair made his career as an academic King became a populist writer and felt this was a better way to encourage rank and file New Zealanders to learn about their history.

There are few books by other authors which can be used to compare against King's. He either wrote his earlier than anyone else, for example the books about Maori, or he wrote about subjects which could only tolerate one book such as the life story of Andreas Reischek. Though there is a 44-year gap between the Sinclair and King books and the topic of history has not changed, the New Zealand appetite has. King admired Sinclair enormously. In *Hidden Places* he said every historian of his own generation looked up to Sinclair for his professional achievement and his standards:

²¹⁵ Mitchell, D.(2003) 'New History Worthy But Flawed', *The Nelson Mail*, URL: Knowledge basket <file:///E:/asKing%20stuff.htm> (accessed 23.02.05)

He has been a brilliant intuitive researcher, an impeccable scholar, a writer whose work has been characterised by flair and resonance. He is also a superb raconteur and the best of party companions.²¹⁶

The Listener asked King to write a profile of Sinclair immediately after he was knighted. King's first draft was rejected on the grounds that it sounded too much like an obituary. King threw it away and wrote about the man he knew – revealing that Sinclair too could swap genre, winning prizes for non fiction and poetry and originally intending to become a novelist. King recalled him as a boisterous lecturer, and a fierce debater who shied away from few topics in his lectures and drew frowns from some members of the academy for his irreverence. He also learned the Maori language. King hints in *Hidden Places* that though Sinclair was considered too prickly to have protégés he did look upon King with some respect.

Kerry Howe, a professor of history at Massey University reviewed King's *History* for the *NZ Herald*. He set his review of King's book in the context of Sinclair's and was fulsome in his praise pausing only to point out that Sinclair's book was long past its use-by date. Howe kept the need to appeal to a general readership at the front of his review as he trawled through some of the other history books written in the past half century. He dismissed James Belich's history of New Zealand published in two parts in 1996 and 2001 as rather too long for general readership and found it "more descriptive than explanatory." *The Oxford History of New Zealand* published in 1981 and edited by H. Oliver and BR Williams was a multi authored work and Howe described this book as "by academics for academics."²¹⁷

But Howe was not prepared to place King's history above Sinclair's. He said King's would be widely accepted "at least for a while" as a defining historical text for the nation but implied that while Keith Sinclair wrote an accessible and readable history of New Zealand for his generation, as had Michael King for his. Howe also chides King for suggesting he is not writing for other historians but curious readers. Howe has no truck with this saying the book is "highly instructive for other historians"²¹⁸ but notes the lack of some academic trappings such as references and implies that King has used some generalised broad brush strokes to

²¹⁶ King, M. (1992) *Hidden Places*, Auckland: Sceptre, p.58

²¹⁷ Howe, K.R. (2004) 'Michael King: The Penguin History of NZ', *The NZ Herald*, URL: www.nzherald.co.nz/entertainment/entertainment (accessed 19/10/2004)

reflect phases in New Zealand's history. Jock Phillips wrote a very lengthy piece about Michael King not long after he had died and in it he said it was clear King had drawn on his skills as a journalist, creative writer and historian to put his history book together. He was impressed by the pace and verve of the book, said few would quarrel with the interpretation, but, few would find much new in it and even more that there was none of the creativity and originality to be found in the books of James Belich. King's skills lay, he said, in a "masterful synthesis."²¹⁹ King was able to pull it all together.

David Mitchell had more criticism of the *Penguin History*. In his review he acknowledged that it was more comprehensive than Sinclair's, had a more comprehensive coverage of pre-European New Zealand, and had a lot more information about early Polynesian settlement, but in Mitchell's mind it "fails to eclipse" Sinclair's book. Interestingly Mitchell preferred Sinclair's considered arguments, precise and careful language over King's "buoyant sense of optimism" and enthusiasm for his subject.²²⁰ King did not include references and footnotes in his book and this did not sit well with some reviewers who wanted to seek more information or have the book acceptable to academics. When deputy prime minister Dr Michael Cullen delivered a Michael King memorial lecture in 2005 he also compared King, Sinclair and Belich. He put King above Belich as more able to connect with a broader audience, and better than Sinclair in being able to relate to the average New Zealander's travel through time. But he chided King mildly for overlooking the multicultural diversity emerging in New Zealand.²²¹

Many more reviews have been written about *The Penguin History of New Zealand*, most comment on the accessible writing style which translates to King's knowing his audience and not being hijacked by academic-ese or the need to educate the academy. It is clear King knew Keith Sinclair well. He had studied the man and his work at close quarters and he knew what he had to do to improve on Sinclair's history.

Both men were natural writers who had honed their skills through a number of genres. Both wrote to the audience of the time, and both represented a picture of New Zealand's history at

²¹⁸ Ibid

²¹⁹ Phillips, J. (2004) *New Zealand Books*, Vol 14, June 2, pp.1-3

²²⁰ Mitchell, D. (2003) 'The History of NZ is Flawed But Worthy', *Nelson Mail*, Dec 31, p.23

²²¹ Cullen, M. (2005) Michael King Memorial lecture, URL:<http://www.beehive.govt.nz/DocumentID=24246> (accessed 14.10.05)

that time. Sinclair *presented* his to a more formal, conventional mono cultural society, King presented his to a society which had withstood a loosening of moral standards, a diversity of political and racial views and substantial growing pains. The writing, the choice of words, even the layout have moved on in their development between the two generations of historians but both writers were working to the same brief and both in their own way largely fulfilled it. If Dr Keith Sinclair was responsible for making New Zealand history a legitimate field of study, Michael King was responsible for taking it to the people.

Chapter 6 - Conclusion

Good writing, as defined in Model A (see Appendix) has been distilled down to some very basic rules. The simplicity of these rules belies the difficulty many writers have in keeping to them. There was a temptation in this thesis to stray into the nature-nurture debate and explore whether the ability to write is born into someone like Michael King. To argue that he inherited the writing genes from a family member and was always destined to use words in the way that some people can paint well, or sing well and others are bad at drawing or tone deaf. Or that he developed his writing ability thanks to his mother and grandmother, who read to him from a very early age, encouraged him to read and love books. Then he had teachers such as Spiro Zavos who continued the fan the flames and introduced him to a writing style which he honed and developed through the rest of his life. Whatever the intention it becomes clear that King was immersed in “good writing” for as long as he could remember. It could also be argued that King had an upbringing typical of many New Zealand youngsters of his age whose family had time to read to them, who pre-dated television therefore books were a chief source of entertainment, and who had teachers who set great store by good teaching practice and encouraged their students to emulate the earlier works of great writers.

This thesis has left that debate aside, apart from recognising some psychological factors in the drivers to good writing, to see what effect journalism had on King’s writing. This effect goes further than choice of words, length of sentences, or use of adjective, but has examined what King the journalist learned about his audience, the structure of his stories, how to interview his subjects, how to research and check facts, and how to write a mixture of facts and quotations to paint a picture. In other words, the excellence of his rhetoric.

Daily journalism engaged him for a while until he felt the need to expand on it, break through some of its strictures and boundaries and broaden his scope while still taking many of disciplines he had learned with him. Some of these have been identified in the review of literature (see model A) and are simple to evaluate:

Words: King learned to use short simple words with no jargon and simple sentences when he learned to write. He was an avid reader and read some of the best authors of the past two centuries. He was encouraged to write well by his high school teachers, and particularly Spiro Zavos.

Audience: He became skilled at identifying his audience and writing to it. His writing about Maori did not arise out of a call for books about that culture gleaned from original sources. It arose out of his perceptive nose for stories which needed to be told.

Tone: His conversational style became a trade-mark. Reviewers marveled at how a man who was highly educated and wrote for the academy could, and even preferred, to write for rank and file New Zealanders in a way which was not condescending or in text-book style, but readable and entertaining but still factual.

Accuracy: Very few take issue with his accuracy. At the *Waikato Times* he was remembered for making few mistakes and though one reviewer has pointed out errors of fact in *The Penguin History of New Zealand* on the whole his work was accurate and credible. He was a trained researcher with a journalist's eye and a historian's respect for the truth.

In Model B the codes of good journalistic writing have been identified, but not all sat well with King, he found some restrictive and unusable.

Timeliness: All good journalism is newsworthy. There are various elements such as people, relevance, and proximity ascribed to what makes news and taken individually these might not be obvious in King's work, but taken together they are. He made news out of history and had a knack of picking topics which caught the interest of a general New Zealand audience. This could be partially due to his cultural astuteness, his ability to sense ebb and flow in the tide of national opinion, or a change of outlook, and open it up for discussion or debate.

Clarity: We know King learned early to "avoid clichés like the plague." He edited his own work rigorously but defended fiercely words he considered necessary. He chose his words well and could write to a number of audiences, from academics to secondary school pupils, even primary students with the School Journal.

Objectivity: Initially King tried to be objective, but by his own admission he became embroiled in issues and injustices and lost his impartiality, yet he retained his respect for the truth and the facts.

Structure: It is well documented that King did not enjoy working to the inverted pyramid structure which most journalists use. He fought against it and triumphed when he started writing short people profiles which allowed him to work his way – gently and with a build-up of interest. King knew the value of quotes and employed his natural people-skills to elicit them.

I have identified a number of personal drivers to good writing and King was clearly motivated by a number of these. If ego leads to a desire for fame and to please then King was well served by his. He did have natural ability which was nurtured and developed by his parents and his teachers and later recognized by his colleagues at the *Waikato Times*. He never doubted that he could make his living by writing though at times he was very poor.

But the strongest personal drivers to Michael King's work were an attachment which grew out of his writing about Maori and a desire to make a difference in New Zealand. Martin Bell's theory that journalists cannot exist in a vacuum and they should care worked for Michael King. He did form an attachment with Maori, their culture and their specific issues. He saw a need and strived to fill it by recording and then representing their history to the New Zealand audience. He was concerned that that audience was ignorant of the culture it had usurped and strove to make better understanding a two-way deal, and he used words to achieve this.

When Michael King is given his professional designation it is generally not one word but a list – journalist, writer, and historian. To tease these disciplines apart and apply them singularly to Michael King is very difficult. He is recognized as a historian and has the academic qualifications to prove it. He has been called this country's "greatest historian" but as Professor Kerry Howe has pointed out that can be a generational attribute and is influenced by timeliness. Had this thesis been written about Michael King the historian it would have been unavoidable not to dwell on his writing and what drove his historical work to be so popular, the two are interdependent. Michael King is not well regarded simply because he was good at studying New Zealand history. He is not well regarded because he had worked

as a journalist for three years. But he is well regarded because he took the skills he learned from the previous two experiences to write books and articles.

His strength lay not only in being good at writing about history for his colleagues in academia and their students, but in being able to write about history in a way which made it understandable and even interesting to the average New Zealander – Maori or Pakeha. He did this by applying the same rules to this form of writing as he did to his stories at the *Waikato Times*. He led his readers along with simple words, easy descriptions, facts and colourful quotes which made the incidents he was describing come alive. He crossed a number of boundaries to reach his readers. He was not afraid to discuss his own personal struggles so others could relate to them. The *Being Pakeha* books were as much about a confused Michael King as they were about a whole raft of confused New Zealanders who came from mixed backgrounds to try and claim a place in a fresh nationality for themselves.

When King started writing about Maori he did it with the very simplest of motives – as a journalist he knew there were good stories that needed to be told. He would not have given a thought to whether he should be writing about them or not. That is not in a journalist's brief. The stories were there, they were good, and King proved himself adept at sniffing them out and writing them up.

He discovered he was fascinated by older Maori people and they loved talking to him. It is possible no one with the ability to turn these conversations into written record had ever taken the time to talk to these people before - no one of their own race or any other. King did take the time, he made the time, and this paid off for him.

King was presumptive in crossing some boundaries. He decided that New Zealand needed to know more about the ways of Maori and produced the television series *Tangata Whenua*. He felt recounting his experiences as a new New Zealander would be enlightening to others, he did it not once but twice, and he had no compunction about re-working books of his own works over again. Michael King also made himself accessible. He had laid himself, and his family to some extent, bare in the *Being Pakeha* books and other autobiographical pieces but he lived as he wrote. He lived simply, gave interviews, talked clearly and lucidly on television, showed he could hurt when people were critical of him, he cared when the

foreshore and seabed issue became controversial and he did not shut himself away from the rough and tumble of New Zealand life.

If journalists are the first writers of history then King drew together the best of both worlds to build a career. This thesis has shown that he was a lover of words and of books. That he was a good scholar and a good historian. That he did not find the mechanics of journalism easy but he was prepared to learn. That he took from journalism some of the best lessons a writer can have – empathy with audience, simplicity, accuracy, deadlines, contacts and interviewing skills. And that he had the strength of personality and character to draw all these together and live on very little money to become one of New Zealand's great writers.

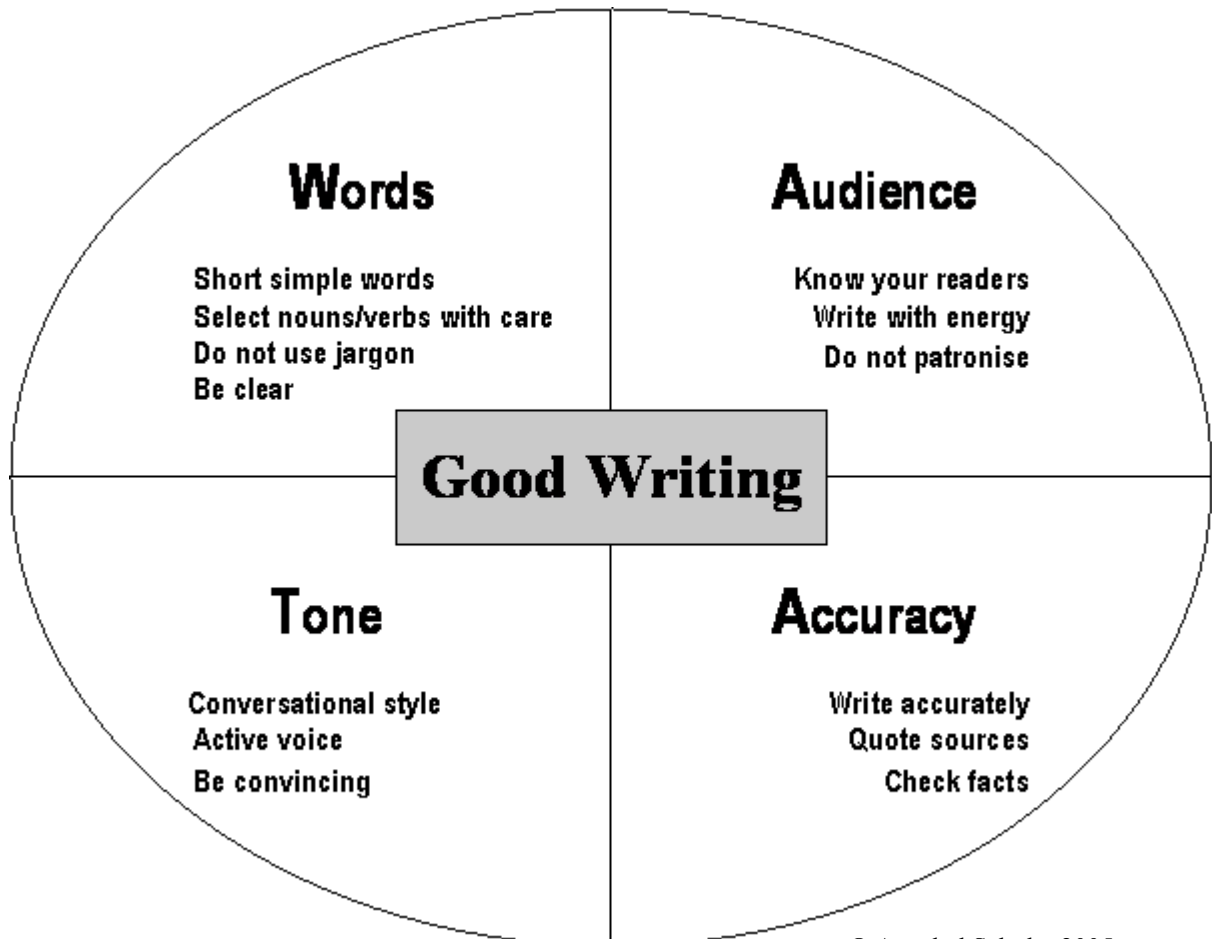
Two learned men who were interviewed for this thesis summed up what made Michael King this country's leading writer and communicator:

“He was a good New Zealander” – Dr Ranginui Walker

“He kept on shouting questions at the world” – Dr James Ritchie.

Appendix

MODEL A



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MODEL B



MODEL C

Personal drivers to good writing

- **Ego (confidence)**
- **Natural ability**
- **Desire to please**
- **Fame**
- **Make a difference**
- **Attachment**

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